TODAY'S SCIENCE FICTION—TOMORROW'S FACT • NOV. 25c

STARTLING stories

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

featuring **THE STAR DICE** *a novel by Roger Dee*

and **THE CROOK IN TIME** *by R. J. McGregor*

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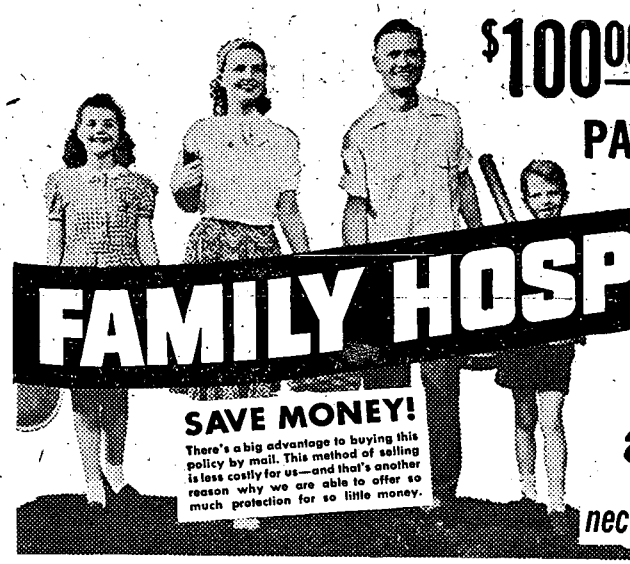

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Address.....

City or Town.....*State*.....

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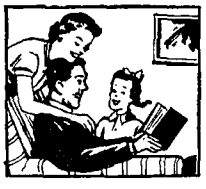

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STARTLING stories

Vol. 28, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION November, 1952

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A Science Fiction Department Featuring Letters from Readers

BEING an incurable gadgeteer, ye ed occasionally takes a turn through the gizmo departments of the big New York stores to bring you, still hot and palpitating, news of the latest advances toward the atomic age. Ambling thus through the appliance section of one of New York's flossiest, our attention was caught and enraptured by an obvious infernal machine.

A large electric motor was mounted vertically on a wheeled platform, its shaft upright. Upon the shaft was a disk shaped like a coolie hat, about eighteen inches in diameter, apparently composed of some vague whitish material, crowned on top by a carved wooden ball. It was spinning rapidly.

We approached this device with caution, circumnavigated it, alert for booby traps, and inspected all sides. It was exactly what it had appeared to be at first glance, a whitish disk spinning on an electric motor; nothing more, nothing less.

Flying Saucer?

Baffled, we caught the eye of a salesgirl engaged in a telephone conversation. We raised an eyebrow, she put a hand over the mouthpiece and whispered, "Flying saucer."

Though it was plausible, we instantly rejected this explanation. "The disk can't take off," we pointed out from our elevation of superior scientific knowledge. "It's fastened on."

She reached behind her and produced a folder which we fell to studying as she finished her call.

The mystery was resolved. The flying saucer turned out to be—you'll never guess so we'll tell you—an electric fan. A science-fiction fan, if you'll pardon the expression.

The folder said the disk was composed of five layers of paper, held together loosely at their centers by the shaft, held loosely apart at their edges by the centrifugal force of their spinning. The theory was that as they revolved they picked up air between their surfaces and hurled it away from them. In truth there was a gentle breeze coming off the edge of the disk, none whatever from its under or upper surfaces.

With the motor shut off, the paper disks slowed and collapsed around the shaft like a soggy umbrella. That was all the machinery there was, five flaccid paper disks.

"It's very scientific," said the salesgirl over our shoulder.

"And very wacky. Sold any yet?"

She hadn't and we didn't wonder at seventy bucks per, with the net practical effect of the gizmo being that it moved about half as much air as a small conventional job.

"A science-fiction fan might buy one," she ventured and we nearly choked.

Little Nightmare

But her blood was up now, and she proceeded to show us other gadgets from her chamber of horrors. First she held up a dyspeptic pink bell-shaped globe, looking like a discouraged lampshade. It was made of some bilious plastic material and, aside from possible use as a hat, could serve no visible earthly purpose.

"What is it?" he groaned.

"A tea cozy," she said primly. "You've got a cup of hot tea ready to irrigate your alimentary canal . . . the phone rings . . . you plunk this little nightmare over the cup and dash off to chat with Aunt Mehitabel. It keeps your tea warm. At three ninety-five a real bargain."

Gratified by our morbid fascination, she warmed to her work. "This Chinese torture chamber . . ." pointing to a metal framed cube with glass windows on all four sides . . . "is a home electric automatic corn popper." It was a good thing she told us. We'd never have made it.

Right next to it was a miniature space ship—a horizontally based metal cylinder with a big

(Continued on page 127)

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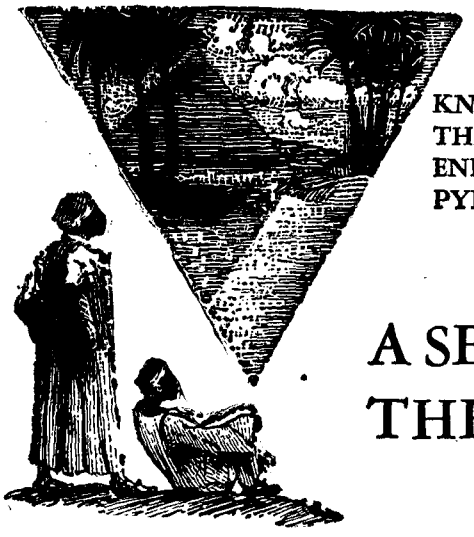

KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

AMENHOTEP IV
Founder of Egypt's
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This Sealed Book—FREE

Has life brought you that personal satisfaction, the sense of achievement and happiness that you desire? If not, it is your duty to yourself to learn about this rational method of applying natural laws for the mastery of life. To the thoughtful person it is obvious that everyone cannot be entrusted with an intimate knowledge of the mysteries of life, for everyone is not capable of properly using it. But if you are one of those possessed of a true desire to forge ahead and wish to make use of the subtle influences of life, the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) will send you A Sealed Book of explanation without obligation. This Sealed Book tells how you, in the privacy of your own home, without interference with your personal affairs or manner of living, may receive these secret teachings. Not weird or strange practices, but a rational application of the basic laws of life. Use the coupon, and obtain your complimentary copy.

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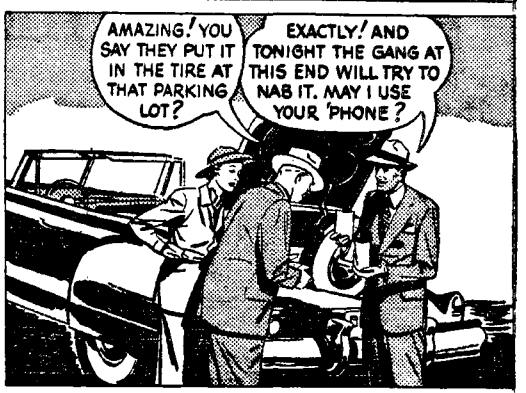
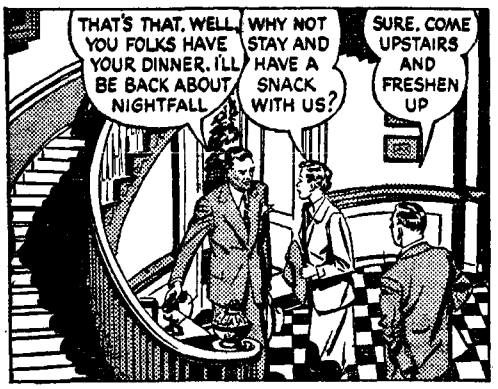
OPIUM SMUGGLERS MEET THEIR MATCH WHEN...

HOMEWARD BOUND AFTER A DAY AT TIJUANA, SENATOR BLAIK AND HIS DAUGHTER STOP AT THE BORDER FOR ROUTINE CUSTOM INSPECTION...


AMAZING! YOU SAY THEY PUT IT IN THE TIRE AT THAT PARKING LOT?
EXACTLY! AND TONIGHT THE GANG AT THIS END WILL TRY TO NAB IT. MAY I USE YOUR 'PHONE?


THAT'S THAT. WELL, YOU FOLKS HAVE YOUR DINNER. I'LL BE BACK ABOUT NIGHTFALL
WHY NOT STAY AND HAVE A SNACK WITH US?
SURE. COME UPSTAIRS AND FRESHEN UP

THIS BLADE SURE MAKES SHORT WORK OF WHISKERS. MY FACE FEELS GREAT!
I'M SOLD ON THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN AND LONG-LASTING

WHEN YOU'RE OUT TO GET QUICK, EASY SHAVES AT A SAVING, THIN GILLETTES ARE JUST YOUR DISH. YOU CAN'T FIND ANOTHER LOW-PRICE BLADE SO KEEN AND LONG-LASTING. THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE FOR YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR... FIT EXACTLY AND PROTECT YOUR FACE FROM NICKS AND IRRITATION. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT 10-BLADE PACKAGE
THIN Gillette 10 BLADES
10-25¢
4-10¢
TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

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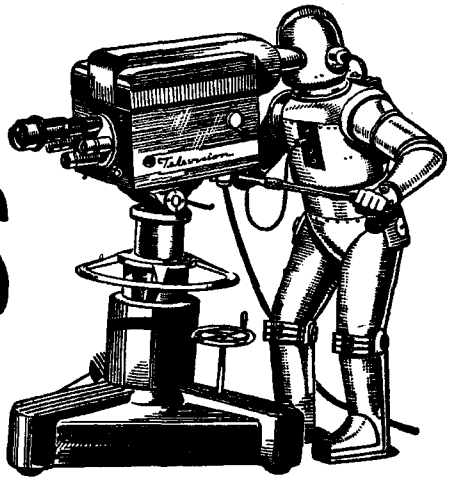
A New Department

VIDEO-TECHNICS

by PAT JONES



NOT so long ago, *tv* was no more than a gleam in a science fiction writer's eye. Today, it is offering a new source of enjoyment for the science fiction devoté.

How to bring the universe into a *tv* studio is no minor problem. Reducing the infinite complexities of the cosmos to the finite dimensions covered by three mobile cameras is no small task, as the engineers and technicians found when the problem of producing science fiction on *tv* was presented to them.

Ordinary *tv* shows can be shot on a studio set which is generally adequate to convey the background that a plot demands. The challenge of science fiction, however, is far more exacting, since it is seldom limited to a static, earthbound set.

In talking to George F. Foley, packager of the popular *Tales of Tomorrow* show, and his executive producer, Mort Abrahams, we found out how one of the major obstacles was overcome.

Let's say a script calls for the portrayal of an actor against a scene of lunar craters. Merely superimposing the video signal from one camera over another would create a "ghost." In this case, that refers to the transparency of the near image, through which the background remains visible. It's as though two photographic negatives were developed, one on top of the other.

This obvious drawback was eliminated by a complex and highly specialized electronic circuit technically known as the "Selective Superimposition Amplifier." The three men responsible for its development, Messrs. Fee, Drucker and Gould of the *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* show, speak affectionately of the fabulous gray box as "the gizmo."

An impressive piece of machinery about 8′x3′x1′ in size, it has rows of buttons on the front and wires, dials and various sized tubes inside. Here's an idea of how it works.

There are two cameras: A background camera is focussed on a normally lighted scene. It may be an ordinary set, a scale model, a film chain, or even a postcard. At the same time, a foreground camera is focussed on a well lighted subject shot against a black background.

The foreground camera has a gray scale sensitive only to shades *lighter than black,* and picks up the figure as it appears against the black background. If an actor happens to have black hair, he'll have to lighten it for a sequence with SSA or appear to have been scalped.

The two images are picked up simultaneously. The signal from the foreground camera is used to blank out a portion of the background camera with a video signal 180′ out of phase with background camera A.

The effect of this is that the foreground image is no more than a silhouette. It is as though the corresponding area had been expertly *cut out* of the background image by the first operation of the SSA.

In the second operation, the video signal is picked up to fill the "hole" resulting from the blanking-out process.

The superimposition is solidly projected against the background, with no hint of a "ghost" or transparency as it would have been without SSA.

By turning the foreground camera at various angles—sideways, upside-down—and with the actors in corresponding positions against the black ground, the cameras simulate free fall.

With the innovations made possible by the invention of SSA, the whole world of science fiction, once limited to Finlay and Orban, can now be translated to your tv screen.

Watch for the stories you'd like to see televised, and let us know. We'll pass the information on for you.

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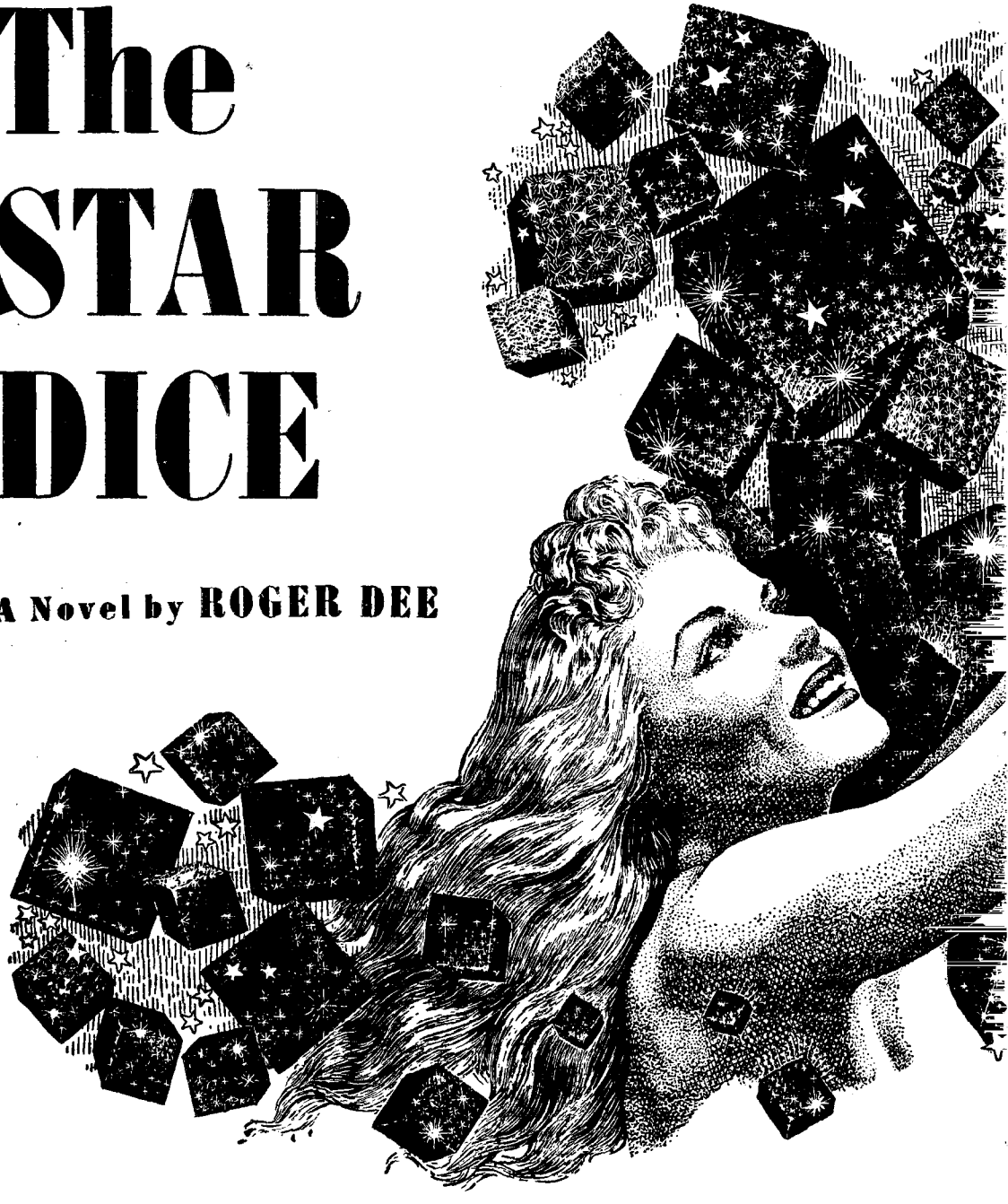
The STAR DICE

A Novel by ROGER DEE



Shannon returned from Space . . . to that strange other-world that had been Earth—where cosmic cubes ruled Man!

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I

THE Kyril rested immobile on its flinty Ionian hillside like a domed, lichen-colored boulder, its lumpish inertness belied by the cool certainty of its telepathic voice. "I am a self-sufficient creature, Paul Shannon," it said. "But I think I shall miss you."

The man squatted beside it, considering the scarred bronze shape of the little one-man ship waiting at the foot of the slope. Beyond the ship sprawled an obsidian nightmare of Ionian badlands, and beyond the badlands swayed a sullen jungle of flame-vines and barbed undergrowth where the lava-lions hunted.

The man stood up and shifted restlessly on bare, calloused feet. His black hair hung to his shoulders, longer but no less wild than the tangle of beard that swept his chest. He wore a brief clout of animal hide, and exposure had browned his

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skin even on a world so far from its parent sun.

"I'm an engineer, not a mechanic nor an astrogator," he said. "I'd never have got the *Flora* repaired and a course laid without your help, Kyril, not in two years nor in a hundred. And now—"

"Now it is time to go," the Kyril said. "You have learned a great deal here, Paul Shannon, but you may have changed more than you know You have lost touch with your own world. There may be times when you will wish you had remained here."

The man shook his head. "You're wrong, for once. It's been hell here, what with the lava-lions hunting me and knowing that Ellen was waiting for me back on Earth. She'll have been waiting for two years, she and Gil Lucas. . .the rest of the world may have forgotten, but never those two."

He laid a hand on the Kyril's gray-green shell. "You hid yourself from men before I came. I won't give you away."

He felt the Kyril's shrug, an enigmatic pulse of no-thought. "When you are on Earth again," the Kyril said, "you may tell men whatever you like. I have no further need of secrecy."

The man stared, his gray eyes puzzled. "I wish I could make you out—sometimes I think you're more than you admit, a great deal more. Can you see into the future, too?"

There was no answer; the Kyril had withdrawn itself. The battered little ship waited below, its presence fanning Shannon's eagerness to be gone.

"I'm going to miss you too," he said. "Goodbye, Kyril. . . ."

HE CAME down faster than he liked, knowing the risk but afraid to place too great a strain upon his jerry-rigged deceleration gear. Half his mind was spring-tense with the vital minutiae of gauging speed and distance without instruments; the other half considered hungrily the growing sweep on Earth's crescent rising to meet him, the day side a mottled mosaic of greens and browns and dancing water-glints, the night side vague and mysterious under its moon-bright mantle of clouds.

He did not try to choose a particular site for landing. It was enough to be back again, to see the soft curve of Earth flattening under him, sweeping up to receive him like a vast, convex cradle.

"*Home*," he said, summing it up in one word.

Where he landed did not matter, since from anywhere on the unified Earth he could reach Ellen Keyne or Gil Lucas by radophone. Still the rosy glow of a city's lights rising against the night heartened him; he would land in an inhabited place, where he could orient himself and get rid of his barbarous mane of hair and beard.

The city-glow swerved away under his descent. Small points of light crept to and fro from it along a far, serpentine path—surface cars, their speed slowed to a crawl by distance. Mountains rose and raced past below him. A single isolated light speared upward, a dark building loomed squarely in the curve of his landing arc—

He struck with a jarring crash that left him gasping, fighting to retain consciousness. Violet flame from his landing jets boiled about the *Flora's* hull, searing the soft earth before he found the controls and shut off the flow of fuel. He found the lever that rotated and swung out the port, and let in a cool night wind heavy with the smell of charred grass.

A door opened in the building toward which he had fallen, throwing a crooked rectangle of light across the darkness, and he saw that it was a farmhouse and that a white ribbon of highway lay between the ship and the light. A man came out of the house, bareheaded and shirt-sleeved, bulking large in silhouette. A woman's voice drifted after him, bell-like and unexcited: "Hurry, Carl. Someone may be hurt. . . ."

The man came across the highway and over the smoking turf to stand in the open port. The glow of the ship's phos-

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phorlights illuminated him palely, a massive young man with curling light hair and blue eyes. He was smiling, his face calm and unsurprised, his whole bearing charged with contentment and another quality more difficult to define.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, and came into the ship. His big hands touched Shannon's naked body gently. "You are welcome here, friend. . .we had expected someone else. Let me help you into the house."

They climbed the porch steps together, Shannon leaning on the big man's arm and shivering in the night wind. In the neat, bare living room a young woman met them, belting a coarse gray robe over her nightgown, her face no more surprised at Shannon's wild look than the man's had been. She was small and slender and red-haired, and the same quality that had puzzled Shannon in the big man's bearing was repeated in her eyes like an echo—a great calmness, a tranquility beyond the definition of peace.

"I am Carl Garrick," the man said. "My wife, Olive. We are farmers—and Cubists."

"You are welcome," the woman said. "You are at home in our home."

For a moment the eyes of the couple caught and held, and when they smiled it came to Shannon suddenly that their strangeness stemmed from possession of a quality which he had never met before—

Serenity. . . .

THE man brought a chair, and a rough woolen blanket which Shannon draped about him gratefully. The woman disappeared into the kitchen and came back with a glass of warm milk.

"We can't give you coffee," she said. "We seldom go into the city. It upsets the Normals there, and they are troubled enough already."

Shannon stared at the glass in his hand, fascinated by the tiny ripples that danced over the white liquid from the trembling of his fingers. Tears stung his eyes when his throat constricted in an agony of anticipation.

"Milk," he said. "My God, *milk!* I'd forgotten it existed."

Carl Garrick came out of the bedroom with scissors and a razor. "The hermit life has its compensations," he said. "We've even learned to cut each other's hair. May I try my hand on yours?"

Wonder grew upon Shannon. His ingrained wariness relaxed, and he felt ashamed when he realized for the first

A Science Fiction First

IN HIS own quiet way a guy named Roger Dee has been making something of a reputation for himself as a triple-threat writer. He can write hilarious comedy (PARADOX PLANET)—moving emotional drama (THE OBLIGATION)—or, as in the case of THE STAR DICE, tense, action-studded melodrama. In addition, publication of THE STAR DICE is something of an event for him: it is his first novel.

His full name is Roger D. Aycock; he is young, happily married, works for Uncle Sam's post office when he is not writing. We first ran across him some years back when he was trying to break in via the western and detective story route. We bought some of those first stories, noting that here was a boy who was never satisfied with a routine plot, but tried always for a fresh note, a new slant, a bit of novelty in every story. You'll find that element in THE STAR DICE—the tale of a man returning from exile to a world he never knew.

—The Editor

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time how unkempt and desperate he must look.

"You are kind," he said. He remembered Ellen Keyne then and his old urgency brought him up straight in his chair, fretting at the delay. "Do you have a radophone here?"

Garrick shook his head. "No. There is no one to call."

Shannon stared. "No one? But I saw the city lights!"

They laughed together. "That would be Denver," Garrick said. "Or Brighton, though Denver would be brighter. I meant that there is no one whom *we* might call."

It baffled Shannon more than ever. "I don't understand. I've been—away—for two years, and I'm out of touch. Why can't you call anyone, or go into town?" A word returned to him, touching him with an odd disquiet. "What are *Normals?*"

They stared at him, and at each other.

"But we're Cubists," Olive Garrick said. "And the Normals—" She turned to her husband, her eyes wide. "Carl, he doesn't *know* about the Cubes!"

NOW he was shaved and bathed, his hair cut short by Garrick's surprisingly expert hands, and he was fed to fullness for the first time since he had crashed on Io. Garrick's rough gray clothing hung slackly on his spare frame. Olive had brought him a mirror; he stared, appalled, at the change in himself.

He had lost twenty pounds. The hair at his temples was touched with gray and the thin hawk face that stared back at him was like a stranger's. He was not the same man who had left Ellen Keyne to make a routine construction estimate for Solar Services on Callisto—he was older, harder, and somehow alien to the identity he remembered.

Thought of Ellen stirred him to eagerness again, and made him conscious of Carl Garrick's voice.

"—they came from out in space, the instruments of Destiny, to awaken and to remake mankind. No one knows what power sent them or directs them; the Servants who taught us at Peace Center, after we had left the Sanctuary in Toledo where we first applied to the Cubes for help, told us that these questions do not matter. The great truth is that the Cubes came to wake men from their unreason, to bring peace by solving every problem and lifting every burden."

Shannon put down the mirror. "It's a cult, then? A new religion?"

"It's not a cult," Carl said. He and Olive looked at each other, smiling. "Nor a religion. It's *reality*, the way things were meant to be in the beginning."

"Reality?" Shannon repeated. He was not really curious; he had seen manias come and go, but Garrick's serene certainty demanded the question. "What sort of reality?"

They shook their heads. "You couldn't understand until you've been through the Change yourself," Carl said. "Could you describe a sunset to a man born blind, or explain musical harmony to a deaf mute?"

For the first time since touching Io, Shannon laughed. "If seeing a Cube will make me as cheerful as you two, I'll look one up the minute I get back to Boston Suburban. God knows I need cheering up, after these past two years!"

"The Cubes will erase all that," Olive said. Her hand found Carl's and clung. "Consider us—before we made the Change, Carl was a muscler for Solar Services in Toledo, and they wouldn't release him for a Guild job. The syndicate pays its musclers to suppress demonstrations among emloyees, you know, and the Guild bribes them. . . ."

"There was a riot once that we couldn't handle," Carl said. "I killed a man, a Guild dock worker, and had to run for it until Solar cleared me. But by that time Olive and I had taken all we could stand, and we went to the nearest Sanctuary for help. The Servants of the Cubes took us to Peace Center for training, and when we were ready they sent us out on our own."

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"And here we are," Olive finished. "Doing our part to set peace before the Normals as a reality instead of as an abstract."

Shannon's restless eyes found the old-fashioned calendar-clock over the mantelpiece, and urgency goaded him when he made out the worn date on the tape: 0400, June 17, 2351.

Two years. Two years of waiting and sweating and dreaming of Ellen. . . .

"How far is it to Brighton?" he asked. "I've got to get to a radophone and—"

He broke off sharply at a sound growing outside. "What's that?"

THEY went to the door together, Carl and Olive Garrick holding hands like children. The white glare of a surface car's sodium lamps blinded them briefly, swinging off the highway and into the farmyard.

The lights went off. Four dark figures piled out of the machine and converged swiftly upon the house. When they entered the rectangle of light from the doorway Shannon felt the set purpose behind their silent approach, and sudden premonition set the hair to prickling along his neck.

They paused at the house steps, and he saw that two of them were armed, not with quartz-lensed shock-rods but with flat, lethal dart guns.

"Fulmer goes in with me," a voice said heavily. "You two watch the exits."

They scattered. "They won't run," someone said, argumentatively. "Cubies never do. . . ."

The two armed men came inside, not alike in build or age or features but wearing upon them a singleness of purpose that woke Shannon's old wariness instantly to life.

These men Shannon could understand —they *hated*.

He backed away, his eyes sweeping the room for a weapon and finding none. The two men watched him, narrow-eyed. One of them made a suggestive motion with his dart-gun; the other halted him with a gesture.

"You're no Cubie," the leader said. "What are you doing here?"

Carl Garrick answered him. "He is a stranger, not one of us. Let him go."

They snarled at him, and he fell silent. Olive came to her husband's side, catching his hand again, and they smiled at each other with a serenity that utterly disregarded danger.

"You should have known better," the leader said to Shannon. "It's a mistake you won't make twice."

"Wait," Shannon said. His throat felt tight and strained; his voice was harsh and loud in his own ears. "What are you going to do?"

They laughed like jackals baying together.

"The Cubie treatment," the second man said. "We're going to kill the three of you. What did you expect?"

Carl Garrick touched Shannon's shoulder. "We expected this—it happens to most of us sooner or later, even in the cities. But we'll be replaced, and that's all that matters."

Shannon stared at him, unbelieving. "You came here knowing you'd be murdered? You're not going to resist?"

"Not all of these men will have been on this sort of errand before," Carl said. His smile was as free as before, unafraid. "What they do here tonight will be a burden upon them, and in the end at least one of them will go to a Sanctuary to be at peace with himself. What happens here will happen over and over again until some day every human being on Earth will have gone to the Cubes and made the Change, and then there will be peace. Forever."

The truth came to Shannon then, stunningly. This was more than just another stupid Utopian cult—it was, in its way, a thing stronger and more dangerous than armed revolution. And these men with guns were the inevitable retaliation, crying the resentment of Normals still free to fear and to hate, coming in darkness to extinguish by violence a flame that could not be fought with hands.

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"That's enough," the leader said. He took a little metal cylinder from a pocket and tossed it toward the back of the room. "Let's get it over with."

The incendiary was still in the air when Shannon lunged. He felt his shoulder smash into the leader's chest, and he clutched blindly for the dart gun when the two of them drove headlong through the doorway and out into darkness. After them came the soft *phut* of the second man's dart-gun. Flame tore the porch steps behind them as they plunged downward.

One of the men detailed to guard the exits stepped out of the night and struck viciously at Shannon's head with a club. He threw himself aside somehow, at the last instant, and the blow caught him across the shoulder.

Agony tore him and fanned his caution to red anger. . . .

II

NEARLY exhausted now, Shannon knelt upon the winded figure struggling beneath him and wrenched the dart gun from its hand. Two years before, the feel of the lethal thing would have sickened him—now it snuggled comfortingly into his hand, urging him on with its cold metal will to be used.

He blasted the man with the club first, at arm's reach. A second figure ran toward him out of the darkness, and he potted it as coldly as he would have cut down a mechanical target in a shooting gallery.

He ran for the house then, knowing that he would be too late when the muffled thumping of another dart-gun sounded inside. A gust of smoke met him at the door; through it he saw Carl and Olive Garrick tumbled together on the floor in a broken, motionless heap.

A man burst through the doorway toward him, flame licking at his heels. Shannon shot him down and ran back into the shadows, still raging. There was another one—the leader, from whom he had taken the gun. . . .

The man was gone. Shannon found the surface car looming before him, highlighted redly in the firelight. He hauled himself into it and backed it, turbomotor screaming, onto the highway. The sodium lights, when he snapped them on, outlined starkly the running figure of the fourth man, plunging desperately to get off the pavement.

Shannon ran him down as carefully as he would have crushed a spider under his heel.

Afterward, he let the machine out and rocketed through the night with the anger dying in him and nausea clogging his throat. When the lights of Brighton rose before him he slackened his speed, trying to marshal some reason into the nightmare that had caught him up.

He had come home to hatred and violence and a fanaticism beyond idiocy—and to what else? If a thing like this could happen in a once quiet countryside, then what might the rest of the world be like?

He thought of Ellen Keyne, and the memory of her cool loveliness was like a breath of sanity out of madness. He had to get to her, or to Gil Lucas, to learn from someone he could trust what had happened to his world.

He pressed down the accelerator, and the lights of Brighton swept nearer.

Lighted windows dulled the first glow of sunrise when he entered the town's narrow suburban limits. Other cars passed him, headlights glaring. Knots of early risers stood on street corners, yawning, waiting for local turbobuses.

No one wore the sort of rough gray clothing that Carl Garrick had given him, and he reasoned that it was a garb peculiar to Cubists. He would have to get rid of it quickly, before the hunt overtook him.

For there must be a hunt. The burning farmhouse would attract attention, and the dead identified. Even in a country so unsettled there would be an investigation; and he was a stranger in Cubist clothing, driving a stolen machine. . . .

He remembered the *Flora* then, and

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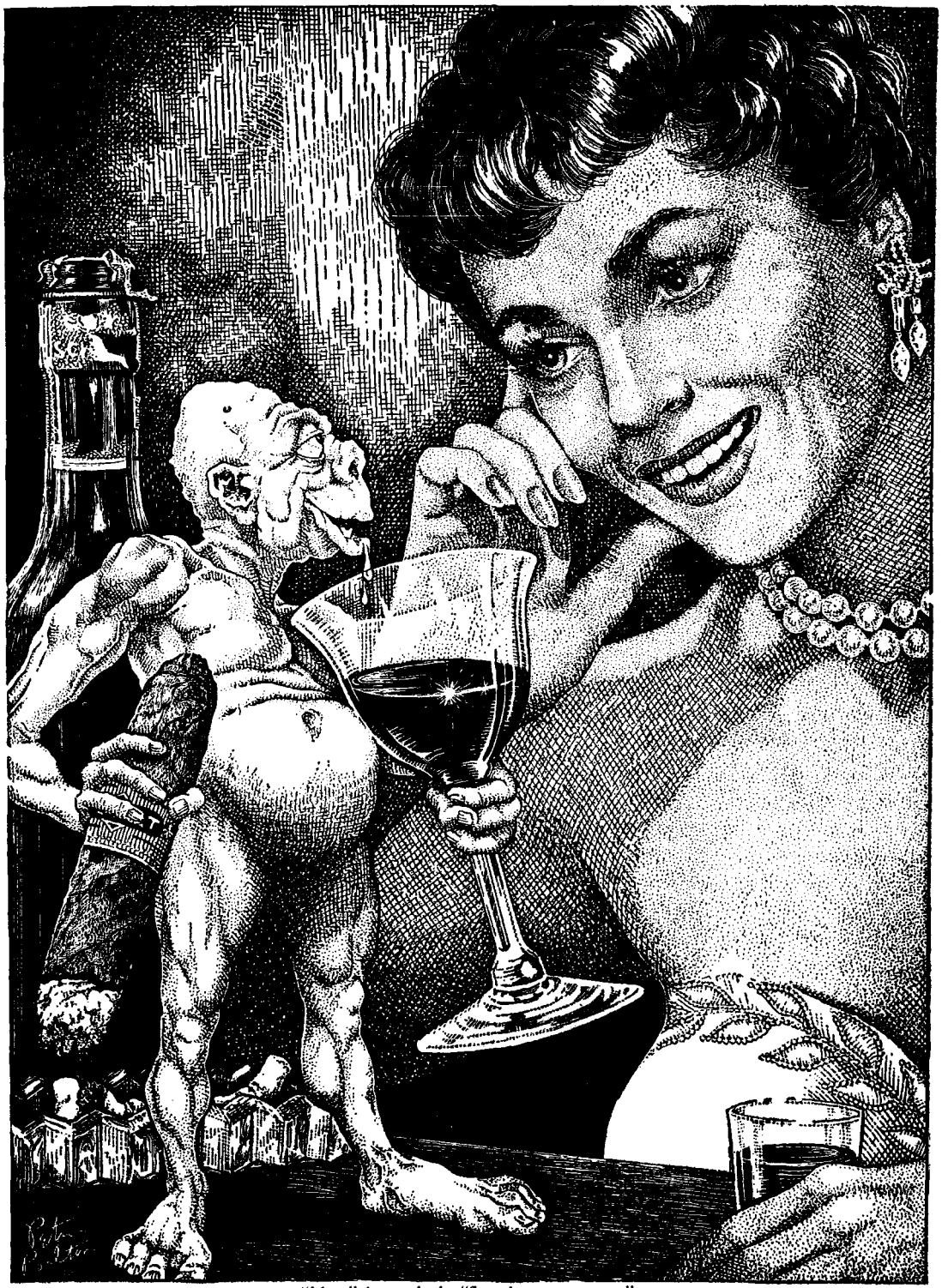

"Men," it croaked. "See, I am men. . . ."

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felt the net close tighter about him. The police would make an immediate check on the little ship, and Solar Services would identify its pilot as Paul Shannon, vanished space engineer. They would be after him in earnest then, armed with descriptions and photographs.

NEAR the center of town he slowed the machine, driving automatically while his mind shuttled busily, looking for a way out. There was no question of going voluntarily to the authorities in a locality that countenanced lynching; his best bet was to get clothing and transportation to Denver, and quickly.

Sight of a small white plastobrick building ahead brought him up short—the jagged fluorescent thunderbolt flashing across its facade advertised it as the Brighton radophone exchange, and its presence suggested the only alternative to flight.

It might be easier, and safer, to call for help than to run for it. . . .

A passenger shuttle hissed overhead as he parked the surface car before the exchange, and the sound made him look up instinctively. The shuttle was gone, but high above the red wash of sunrise in the east he saw the pale violet arc of a stratoliner dropping down to Denver.

It might as well have been halfway across the continent.

He had no money, and in his gray Cubist garb he could not afford the risk of entering the Brighton shuttle port even if he could pay for a ticket. He might be mobbed; at best he would be remembered, and the chase would close in the tighter. Still he filed the possibility away as alternate choice if the radophone should fail him—he was armed, and if it came to that he could take what he needed.

He went into the radophone exchange warily, calculating his chances. It would be foolhardy to call Ellen first, no matter how strong his longing, since she would be in no position to offer help.

His first call must be to Gil Lucas.

At that early hour the exchange was empty except for a bored and heavy-eyed clerk who gave Shannon a disapproving scowl and went back to his nodding. Shannon took the first booth, his hands busy with the selector banks before the door closed behind him.

The muted hum of open circuit died. The screen lighted, displaying bold, stiff-lettered words: BOSTON SUB INF.

"Lucas, Gilbert F.," he said into the microphone orifice.

The screen flickered: *Lucas, Gilbert F. Physicist. Res* 1220 *Antoine. Code AN*67897.

He sat down on the padded customer's chair and leaned forward, sweating with sudden tension. So close—so close, after two years, and there was so little time. . . .

"Announce Paul Shannon," he said. "Brighton, Colorado. Ring at once, receiver's charge."

Robot controls juggled distant relays. Shannon waited, wiping slippery palms against the rough fabric of his gray trousers.

A man's face appeared on the screen—a heavy man, middle-aged, his sparse gray hair carefully brushed to hide a bald spot and his intent small eyes showing no trace of sleep. It was not Gil.

"I don't know you," the man said. "What do you want?"

"I am calling Gilbert Lucas," Shannon said. "I'm a very old friend of his—will you put Gil on the circuit, please?"

The fat man considered him dispassionately. "Radophone Control is getting lax," he said. "This number should have been cleared long ago. No one named Lucas has lived here, to my certain knowledge, for thirteen months."

The screen flickered and was blank.

Frustration made Shannon almost ill. There was no way of finding Gil's new address short of calling for a personal check of Boston Suburban radophone files, and a manual examination would take far more time than he had to spare. The same difficulty prevented his calling Ellen—the police might be on his heels already.

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The weight of the dart-gun in his pocket brought him up with sudden resolution. The car outside, with luck, would get him out of Brighton, and once in Denver he could apply to Solar Services for help. Failing there, he still had the ultimate alternative of taking money and clothing at gunpoint and forcing his way aboard an Eastbound stratoliner at Denver Port.

IN THE speeding car, his Cubist clothing attracted less attention than he had expected; he reached Denver, short minutes later, without being stopped. It was not until he entered the city and began working his way toward the slender, comet-topped spire of Denver's Solar Services building that he drew his first stares.

Occasionally he saw gray-clad Cubists walking the streets, smiling and unhurried, unmolested here where the machinery of law functioned more normally. But none of them drove cars, and he guessed that it was against custom for Cubists to operate machines. Wary of attracting attention, he left the car on the first stretch of empty street and went ahead on foot.

He had not far to go.

A stratoliner soared up ahead, chemical takeoff jets roaring, and when he rounded the corner he found himself outside a steel-mesh fence encircling the Denver stratoport. A block away, at the end of the field opposite the port's latticed signal tower, rose the commanding bulk of the Solar Services building.

He went toward it briskly, past shops just opening for the morning trade, trying now that he was afoot to meet the stares of passersby with something of a Cubists' customary serenity.

At the entrance ramp he passed, unnoticing, a small van of the type used by caterers and florists, parked parallel to the curb with its turbomotor idling. He started for the ramp—and stopped, startled, when the van door opened suddenly and a man stepped out to bar his way.

"We expected you earlier," the man said. When Shannon put a hand to his jacket pocket, he said warningly: "Don't force a scene, Mr. Shannon. We mean you no harm. Get into the van."

Shannon turned, estimating his chances. The driver of the van held a shock-rod ready, its conical quartz lens aimed at Shannon's chest. Shannon got in, moving toward the rear of the paneled body at a gesture from the driver. The vehicle was empty except for a suit of casual brown street tweeds that hung, neatly pressed, from a wall hook.

The man on the street came in after him and shut the door. "Your welcome at Solar Services would have been surprising," he said. "And disappointing. If you'll put on the clothing we brought, we'll be going now."

He frowned when Shannon did not move. "Please don't delay us, Mr. Shannon—we've timed this rather closely, and we can't stop for questions. Put on the suit!"

Shannon stripped off his rough gray garments and slipped into the tweeds. They hung on him loosely, but he found himself, without giving the matter conscious thought, approving the cut and material. He had owned a similar suit once, before his unlucky Callistan mission; Ellen Keyne had helped select it, matching color and style to blend with his dark skin and black hair.

He patted the pockets automatically, and stiffened when he felt the outlines of a wallet in the jacket pocket.

"I don't understand any of this," he said. He had a sudden sense of being maneuvered about like an animal in a pen, and it angered him. "Will you drop the telemovie dramatics and tell me what you want?"

"You'll know soon enough," the driver said.

HE TOUCHED a gear stud on the steering column and put away his shock-rod. The van purred into motion, made a right turn and leaned into an ascending curve. There was presently the sensation of climbing a gently sloping

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ramp, and the van stopped. The man beside the driver got out; Shannon, following, found himself inside the steel-mesh fence of the stratoplane port, a short stone's throw from the flight terminal.

"You'll find a ticket and money in the wallet," the man said. "You'll find a Boston Port stratoliner loading at Ramp Seven. You have two minutes to get aboard it."

The van slid away, leaving Shannon to stare after it briefly before he went into the terminal to find Ramp Seven. The brown leather wallet, when he opened it, yielded a thin sheaf of yellow credit notes and a single-hop ticket; the attendant accepted the ticket without remark, and a trim blonde stewardess showed Shannon to his seat.

For minutes after the takeoff he put off all speculation, sizing up the other passengers and satisfying himself that he was not still under surveillance. When he turned his mind back to the wallet and clothing, a belated sense of familiarity brought him out of his seat and sent him back to the men's lavatory.

With the door bolted behind him he took out the wallet and scanned the papers it contained. They were stamped with a date two years earlier—and they identified him unequivocally as one Paul Shannon, construction engineer in the employ of Solar Services. There was even an unmistakably genuine full-face photograph of himself.

He shut the leather case and returned it to his pocket, feeling a sudden chill of unreality.

It was his own wallet. . . .

For a long time he stood without moving, staring at his reflection in the lavatory mirror, trying to fit the wallet into the tangle of contradictions that hemmed him in. He remembered it perfectly; an old one, too good to throw away but too shabby to display when he took Ellen out at night. He had left it behind when he set out for Callisto. . . .

He had left it in his apartment in Boston Suburban, in the pockets of a brown tweed suit.

In spite of his premonition he was trembling a little when he took off the jacket and looked at the tailor's label above the inside breast pocket. He found what he had expected to find, a row of neatly stitched letters that spelled out his own name: *Paul T. Shannon.*

HE GAVE it up, finally, and went back to his seat. The blonde stewardess paused beside him on her way to the control cabin and gave him a more than professional smile, her eyes openly interested.

"I don't remember you from previous runs," she said brightly. "Is there anything I can get for you, sir?"

He watched the movement of her discreetly rouged mouth, matching the sound of her voice against his memory of other women's voices, against Ellen's. He had forgotten more than he had realized, out there on Io. . . .

Suddenly the two lost years seemed no more than a vanished dream, a dissolving figment of nightmare, and he felt the reassuring sanity of normal living rest upon him like a comforting hand.

"Yes," he said, and felt saliva start at the back of his tongue at memory of a long-forgotten taste. "I came aboard in a hurry. . .can you get me some cigarettes?"

She turned on her smile again, but her eyes were disappointed. "We don't stock them, of course, but I have some extras in my locker. I'll get you a package."

She was back almost at once, shaking her head when he reached for his wallet. "Call it a souvenir of the trip, please. I know what it is to be caught without smokes."

She left him then and went down the aisle to chat with a fat elderly man who was obviously a regular passenger. It seemed to Shannon that she swung her trim body a trifle more consciously than when he had first seen her, and the incident puzzled him until belated understanding came.

"I'll be damned," he thought, remembering the hard, wary face that had

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looked back at him from the lavatory mirror and comparing it with the soft, sleek grooming of the other passengers. "She's mistaken me for a space pilot or something else as glamorous. I must stand out like a circus bear!"

It set him to thinking about himself, a pastime foreign to his nature, and for the first time he realized something of the change two years had made in him. He not only looked different—he *was* different.

He saw the stewardess observing him curiously, and realized that he was still holding the unopened pack of cigarettes. He ripped it open, shook out a slender cylinder and puffed it until the end began to glow.

The smoke was rich and smooth in his throat, relaxing further the tension that had ridden him since his return. He settled more comfortably into his seat and let his mind again run over the bewildering chain of improbabilities that had brought him here.

III

AS SHANNON relaxed, the only possible solution came to him radophone call to Boston Suburban.

"Gil Lucas!" he said aloud, so sharply that the man in the seat ahead started and looked curiously over his shoulder.

The radophone robotics would have announced his name and the origin of his call, yet the fat man who answered had accepted receiver's charges to deny acquaintance either with Paul Shannon or Gilbert Lucas. Why?

Because the fat man had wanted to see his face, to make certain that it was Paul Shannon who called.

The fat man must have relayed his call to Gil; how else would the men in the van have known where to meet him? No one but Gil could have sent them, or have known where to find his clothing and the wallet with his identification. . . .

He found the flaw in his reasoning,

[*Turn page*]

"BILL'S A GREAT DATE, but he's a square about his hair. He's got all the signs of Dry Scalp! Dull hair that a rake couldn't comb . . . and loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"

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and the puzzle fell again into a hopeless confusion of unrelated pieces.

Gil must have had the suit and wallet ready in Denver, for they could not have been flown even by stratoplane to him in so short a time. But not even Gil could have known in advance that Shannon would be in Denver this morning. No one could have known. . .unless he accepted the inference that his landing at Brighton had been anticipated.

And that, in turn, would imply that someone had known where he had spent the last two years.

He gave it up and lit another cigarette, trying to force the whole contradictory jumble out of his mind. Once at home again he could find Gil and get his explanations at first hand; at the moment, a vastly more important need demanded his attention.

He had to get to Ellen Keyne.

The familiar bustle of Boston Port allayed some of his impatience and made him feel at last that he was truly coming home. He made his way rapidly through the thronged terminal, gathering confidence from the well-remembered confusion of baggage carts and vari-colored phosphorlight schedule boards and the pervading hum of busy voices.

He found the city gates and went out upon a wide, sheltered platform. A local shuttle had just pulled in and was disgorging passengers into the terminal; it would be empty in a moment, and he could get passage on it to Boston Suburban.

At his elbow a news machine crackled, the commentator's voice reaching with practiced inflection for the passerby's attention. A knot of listeners drifted aimlessly about it, jostling Shannon with the commuter's impersonal rudeness. Disjointed fragments of informative gabble filtered through his preoccupation:

". . .Guild Head Zimmer Conniston last night delivered an ultimatum to Governing Council, threatening industrial shutdown unless hiring of non-Guild Cubist employees is halted. . ."

". . .special police troops rushed to guard Cubist Peace Center in Ohio against Guild demonstrations. . .protective surveillance established over local Sanctuaries. . ."

". . .Grover Orsham, Solar Services Director, announces a counter program to end discrimination against Cubist workers, pointing to excellent efficiency records. . ."

HE TOOK away with him a vague conviction that the Cubes represented an even more important issue than he had suspected. It was more than another fanatic cult; obviously, the Change was involved in the country's basic economic structure, and the talk of work stoppage and placement of government police had an ominous sound.

With the emptying of the shuttle Shannon drifted aboard with the crowd, putting the uneasy conjectures out of his mind. There would be time to consider new conditions later, after he had seen Ellen and Gil Lucas.

The shuttle slid smoothly down its track, flashed across the terminal yards and into the air. Boston Port fell away, and with its going Shannon expelled a ragged breath of relief. He had come four hundred million miles, and he had waited through two interminable years. He fought his impatience now, telling himself that he could wait a few minutes more.

Somehow he had still half expected to be met by police at Boston Suburban, to be snatched at the last moment from his triumph. But he was only another casual passenger alighting from the shuttle, another nonentity lost in the anonymous bustling of the crowd.

He went through the Suburban terminal quickly and made for the street exit, his eye searching the street outside for waiting cabs. At the moment there was none; in his eagerness, Shannon nearly collided with a man waiting under the marquee outside, and swerved sharply to avoid contact.

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The sound of his name being called shook him indescribably. "Mr. Shannon —wait!"

He had a startled glimpse of a stocky man of middle age, a confused impression of gray hair and of imperious blue eyes in a square, weathered face. There was no question of waiting—Shannon ran, the gray concrete of the exit ramp blurring under his feet.

At the curb a private car waited, turbomotor idling, in defiance of the brass *No Parking* bosses inlaid in huge letters across the sidewalk. A young woman in mannish brown coveralls waited under the driver's wheel, watching his flight with wide eyes.

A cab darted in. Shannon ran for it with his pursuer's voice rising after him: "Shannon! Wait!"

The girl in the car leaned from her window, taking up the cry. "Let the cab go, Mr. Shannon! You don't understand—"

He swung aboard the cab and was gone without looking back. In the rear-view mirror, briefly, he caught a wavering glimpse of the car behind him wheeling away from the curb.

He was leaning forward to give his destination to the driver when it occurred to him that a check on public conveyances was the first step in police routine.

"Take me to the intersection of Everett and Charles," he said, compromising. "And hurry!"

THE Keyne house was as he remembered it, as he had recreated it for the Kyril a thousand times on his jagged Ionian hillside: an unpretentious white brick house with a green roof and shutters to match, its flowering window-boxes setting vivid splashes of color above trimmed evergreens.

He cut across the lawn and climbed the steps and pressed a trembling finger upon the bell push.

With the action came a confusion of crowding memories, superimposed one upon another: handing Ellen out of a cab at the curb, crossing the lawn in snow or in soft summer darkness; on the porch, standing to one side of the door so that the hall lights would not pick them out when Ellen put light hands on his shoulders and stood on tiptoe to kiss him goodnight. . . .

The faint musical sound of the bell drifted through the house. There was answering movement, a sense of footsteps felt rather than heard, the indefinable certainty of approach.

Ellen's mother opened the door.

Two years ago Myra Keyne had been a thin, ineffectual woman, wholly absorbed in her petty household concerns and a little inclined toward petulance. Now the serenity of her face was a thing utterly alien to his memory, an unhuman compounding of calm and contentment.

Until now he had not faced the possibility that the Change might have penetrated here; the horror that had fallen upon him at the Garrick farmhouse came to him again, icily.

"It's good to see you again," Myra Keyne said. She opened the door to him, smiling. "We heard the news of your return, Paul, and hoped you would come here first."

She took his hands and led him inside, the rustle of her sober gray dress loud in the indoor silence. The tranquil feel of her went with them like an aura. In the living room, Shannon stood dumbly, trying with dry tongue to find the words he had come four hundred million miles to say.

"Ellen?" he got out finally. "Is she—"

She nodded serenely. "Ellen is here. I'm afraid all this may prove a shock to you, Paul, since you can't have been home long enough to understand about—"

He seized her shoulders and shook her violently. "What's happened to Ellen? Where is she?"

An inner door opened behind him. Ellen's voice came to him out of a vast, waiting silence, gently pleased and utterly composed.

"Paul! We were waiting for you!"

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LATER, he thought that he must have gone a little mad. The soft pressure of Ellen's hands against his chest made him aware finally that he was crushing her to him and that she was trying, gently and without protest, to extricate herself.

"Ellen," he said hoarsely. *"Ellen. . ."*

She was like a child in his hands, without response. The rough gray cloth of her dress rustled like paper under his touch. Her soft fair hair fell in a bright shower to her shoulders; her eyes met his fully, stirred by compassion but mirroring nothing of his own loss.

"I waited, Paul," she said. "But you didn't come back, and everyone gave you up for dead. . .then Father died, and Mother and I went to the Cube here at the Suburban Sanctuary. The Change was wonderful—it took away all our grief and resentment and made life full for us. You'll understand when you go to a Sanctuary for yourself."

He stood dumbly, watching the movement of her lips and the familiar tilt of her head, trying to make himself understand that all his journeying ended here and that there was nothing further to yearn toward. He could not accept it as a finality; he understood only that he had somehow been cheated without reason or design, and of his old eagerness nothing was left but a red, bitter anger.

He let her go and stood back, feeling alone and desolate. "Ellen," he said finally. "My God, how could you have done it? I'd rather find you dead!"

"It's the only reality, Paul," she said with smiling insistence. "The thing men have striven for always, but never found because they never understood the goal they fought for—peace."

The silence of the house closed in upon him, oppressively.

The same sense of peace was here that he had felt at the Garricks', but with a difference. The Garricks had been strangers, and their alienness had touched him only from the outside; in this house he felt like an uneasy barbarian in the presence of his dead, alone in a place still peopled by the familiar departed.

"I understand too well," he said. "I've lost you, after going through two years of hell to get back. Is there no way to reverse this thing, Ellen, and be your old self again?"

She smiled at him as at a headstrong child. "It can't be reversed, ever. None of us would go back even if we could, Paul. But you haven't lost me—go to a Sanctuary and tell the Servants everything, and when you are released from Peace Center we can start again as if nothing had happened."

He shook his head. "I'd as soon be a robot. I wouldn't be myself after that—I can't do it."

Her next suggestion was infinitely revolting. "There's another way, if you choose to use it. You can take me as I am, to do with as you please. No one considers Cubists as individuals—we're only votes to the politicians, producers to the industrialists and nuisances to the public. Only the Guilds take us seriously enough to hate, because we come mostly from their numbers and weaken their strength. No one protects us individually. You'd have no opposition if you claimed me at this very moment and took me away."

He stared, appalled. *"Take* you? You mean you'd go away with me now if I asked you, or with anyone else who wanted you?"

"Of course," she said. Her smile was serene, undisturbed. "There's no defiance in us, don't you see? We couldn't set the Normals an example for peace if we resisted, because there would be no peace. Normals fear poverty and violence and death—we don't, and our numbers grow from day to day because of it. Some day everyone will have made the Change, and only then shall we have a real and lasting peace. Don't you see how simple it is, Paul?"

Carl Garrick's words came back to him: *". . .and in the end they must go to the Cubes to be at peace with themselves. . .and then there will be peace. Forever."*

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AGAIN the enormity of it stunned him, driven the deeper because it was Ellen who made the thing clear and because Ellen was, literally, his world. He imagined an Earth becalmed, boundaries and ideologies erased, all human striving subsiding into a serene and smiling stagnancy. . . .

Over it all the Cubes, whatever they were, their cryptic intentions still unexplained, would rule. He conceived of the whole thing then as a plot, a cabal not contrived by the infantile cunning of men but born somewhere in distant alien darkness to spread like a virus across Earth and conquer all that it touched.

He could not entirely grasp the complexity of the thought, but still he could sense the threat inherent in an abstract so paradoxically dangerous as an absolute and universal peace. And because he was a man who to justify his existence must believe in something greater than himself, he put aside his old purpose and shouldered a new one, disguising a basic idealism under the raw hurt of his personal loss.

"It won't do," he said. "A thing like this can't happen to the world."

"I understand how lost you must feel," Ellen said, "when you can't yet know what the Cubes offer. But there's a Sanctuary in Boston Suburban, Paul—please go to it and let the Servants show you what it means to be free and whole."

"I'll look them up," Shannon said. In that instant his intention took shape, born of his anger and the bitter necessity of striking back. "God, yes, I'll see them—in due time!"

As he left the Keynes' house, the surface car that had followed him from the shuttle terminal waited for him at the curb, motor idling so quietly that Shannon would have passed unnoticing if the man had not called out to him.

"Mr. Shannon! Will you talk to us now?"

He halted, his eyes going from the

[*Turn page*]

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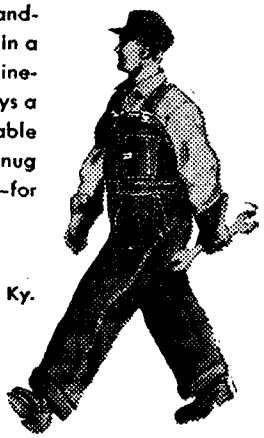

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caller to the girl behind the wheel. She was tall, with dark hair and eyes that contrasted strongly against the indoor fairness of her skin, her most notable attraction a round-limbed feminine strength that defied the enveloping coveralls. She met Shannon's stare impersonally except for a faint tightening of her wide, full mouth.

"We're losing time," the man said. "I am Dace Nugent, Mr. Shannon—my daughter, Ruth. Will you trust yourself with us for a short time?"

Shannon shrugged and climbed in. "I've nothing to lose—and if you can tell me what has happened to the world while I was away, I'll listen to anything."

He sat back and tried to relax when the girl put the machine in motion, and with the easing of his tension a weariness close to exhaustion fell upon him. He tried to remember when he had last slept, and was startled when he could not.

They were well into the outskirts of the residential section when he spoke again. "Will you take me to a place where I can get a drink while we talk? I haven't had a drink for two years, and I think I'm going to need one."

IV

IT WAS not a bar to which they took him, but to a businesslike grouping of corrugated iron buildings at the edge of town. They passed through a barbed metal fence and were halfway to the central—and only wooden—structure before Shannon saw the ship.

It rested horizontally upon a reinforced concrete apron, the midday sun gleaming on its polished bronze length, a great copper cylinder three hundred feet long and a third as high. A cryptic grouping of transparent blisters ringed either end; he looked automatically for driving jets, and found none.

It was no sort of conventionally designed ship he had ever seen, a shape so unorthodox that he was still puzzling over it when the car halted before the central building.

A slight, sandy-haired man came out to meet them, a long roll of blueprints furled under his arm. He was dressed in careless soiled trousers and open-necked shirt, and there was a sooty smudge across his blunt-featured face. His light eyes studied Shannon curiously, and lighted eloquently when he turned his attention to Ruth Nugent.

She asked directly, not bothering to introduce Shannon: "How did the driver tests go, Alec? Was there any interfield backlash?"

The man shook his head, smiling. "The tests were good. She's ready for a trial run whenever you say."

Dace Nugent said somberly, "That will be soon. Our time is getting shorter and—" He caught himself up and made belated introductions: "Alec Blair, Paul Shannon. . .Alec is our white hope in this project, Mr. Shannon—superintendent of construction and skipper of the ship when it's launched. You'll be working with him closely if you accept our offer."

Shannon and Blair nodded, measuring each other. Except for his interest in Ruth Nugent, Blair struck Shannon as the dry, patient sort, more cautious than forceful, but likely to be an expert in his own line.

They got out of the car, and Shannon felt an unexpected stir of interest when Ruth Nugent stood beside him. She was taller than her father and Alec Blair, so close to Shannon's own height that their eyes were almost level.

Dace Nugent headed directly for the wooden building. "You'll be in for lunch, Alec? We may need your help to convince Shannon."

Blair nodded and disappeared into the nearest shop with his roll of blueprints. Shannon followed the Nugents inside, surprised to find that the room was not an office but the central unit of a hastily built living quarters.

He looked about him, puzzled. "I don't understand this. I took it for granted that you were reporters of some sort."

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"You'll meet reporters enough when they nose you out," Nugent said. "We're not interested in gathering news, but in making it."

He caught his daughter's eye and they smiled at each other briefly, an unmistakable exchange of implicit confidence.

"You can bring us that drink now," he said. "I think Mr. Shannon is going to need it, when he learns what he's up against."

THE sofa was comfortable, the drink infinitely satisfying. Together they made Shannon more than ever conscious of his near exhaustion, but did nothing to relax his wariness.

"You knew where to meet me at the Suburban shuttle terminal," he said. "And when I gave you the slip there you knew where to pick me up again at the Keyne house. Do you know what I found there, too?"

Nugent looked sober. "Yes. I checked into your past after hearing the news of your return on the morning visicasts, working on the idea that you might make a good recruit for our project, and learned that your fiancée had turned Cubist. We can sympathize with you—my wife, Ruth's mother, made the same Change fifteen months ago. We have not seen her for more than a year."

Ruth Nugent came in from the kitchen. "Why don't you tell him the truth? If you're going to ask him to join us, you may as well tell him what can happen to people who turn Cubist."

She turned on Shannon, her eyes dark and hot. "We've lived in this place for a year because we couldn't bear our apartment in town without Mother. We brought her home from the Ohio Peace Center when her three months of training were up, but she didn't stay. She—disappeared."

Nugent filled a stubby pipe, his hands not quite steady. "She was kidnaped, Shannon, by a ring that specializes in transporting and selling Cubists to South America. I found her eventually and tried to bring her back—and failed. Like a good Cubist, she refused to press her right of citizenship and extradition."

Ruth turned back toward the kitchen, and stopped halfway to look up at a framed photograph on the wall. Shannon, following her glance, saw that it was not a woman's picture but a craggy Moonscape, the slender spire of an old-style space ship outlined against black crater-mouths and bleak, jagged mountains. Tiny figures stood about the ship and waved in clumsy salute, airsuits billowed out against the no-pressure of space.

It was very familiar; Shannon had owned one like it in his school days, when he had aspired to be a space pilot instead of a Solar Services engineer. The ship was the *Prometheus*, first space craft to break man's planetary bondage. . . .

"I'm telling you this, Mr. Shannon," Nugent's voice said harshly, "to show you how much in earnest we are about our project, why we've got to get away from Earth before it's too late."

Shannon stared, taken aback.

"There is even less protection for Cubists over the rest of the world than in the States," Nugent said. "My wife is, and has been since her abduction, an inmate of a Colombian brothel."

His eyes considered Shannon, weighing him. "You've a vendetta of your own against the Cubes, but you may as well give up the idea of fighting them, Mr. Shannon. It's a hopeless contest."

RUTH NUGENT broke the strain by turning from the framed Moonscape, meeting Shannon's look with a curious pride.

"We haven't given up," she said. "My father built that ship—that one and the *Icarus*, the first to reach Mars. But they are nothing, compared to the new one."

He understood then, and looked at Dace Nugent with sudden respect. "So you're *that* Nugent! You're practically a legend, sir—under different circumstances, I'd feel honored to be here."

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"But as it is you're more curious than pleased," Nugent said. "And more disturbed than curious. . . So is the rest of the world, except for two minority groups—the Cubists, and a little handful of us here who comprise the staff of the *Ark*."

"The *Ark*? Is that symbolism?"

"It's symbolism and more," Nugent said. "Earth is a lost world, Shannon, mankind is a lost race. Alec Blair and I and a few more realized that a year ago, and built the *Ark* to save whatever remnant of the race may be worth saving. She's the first stellar ship ever built—and will probably be the last, since we're setting out in exactly nineteen days for 61 Cygni."

Shannon laughed, incredulously. "If you were anyone else, I'd say you were insane, Mr. Nugent. 61 Cygni is ten light years—"

"I didn't bring you here to acquaint me with stellar distances," Nugent said, "but to ask you to ship with us as part of the staff. We're going to need an aggressive and experienced man to head our colonizing party. You fit that description, Mr. Shannon, else you wouldn't have managed to exist two years off Earth."

"You're asking *me* to go? Man, you *are* mad!"

Ruth Nugent came across the room toward him. "Why shouldn't you go? What is there left for you here, Mr. Shannon?"

The challenge in her voice angered him, and the anger steadied him.

"A great deal," he said. "There is Ellen—I'm going to find a way to break that damned fanatic hypnosis of hers if I have to crack the globe doing it."

"It can't be broken—we've proved that, endlessly, with my mother. And what will you do when you fail?"

"There was never a substitute for success," Shannon said. "Unless it's revenge."

The second drink, coupled with his near exhaustion, made him a little drunk.

He sat with the empty glass cold in his hand, only half hearing Nugent's voice through a blue haze of pipe smoke, his mind grasping for thoughts that slipped through his awareness like elusive fish through a clouded pool. In the kitchen Ruth Nugent made efficient bustling sounds; the smell of coffee and the sizzle of something frying drifted to him, inconsequential details of a vague and meaningless background.

He was at grips again with the fantastic puzzle that had grown up about him, probing for the core of sense that must be in it somewhere—and finding none.

". . . the fact that we haven't been able to guess the origin of their influence is proof enough that we're losing the fight," Nugent was saying. "Oh, something might have been done when they first appeared, when they were more a curious phenomenon than a menace, and before the technicians who analyzed them fell under their spell. But the Cubes are under Government protection now—paradoxical as it sounds, the republican principle must safeguard any element so important to a large number of people—and their following in growing so fast that the end may be only months away. We've rushed construction of the *Ark* to finish ahead of that day—getting away from Earth is the only way out. You'll see that after you've had your try at remaking the world."

EVEN admitting the man's earnestness, Shannon automatically discounted the cogency of his argument. Nugent was a practical idealist with an axe to grind—he had built the first two solar ships, paving the way for terrestrial expansion, and now he was aiming at the stars. To prove his point he was willing to undertake a flight that might last decades past his lifetime. Unable to finish his own undertaking, he was recruiting a crew—the end justifying his means—to finish it for him.

A more immediate consideration oc-

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curred to Shannon, spurring him to wariness again.

"You said that the news of my return was on the morning visicasts. Tell me—are the police looking for me?"

Nugent, in the act of pouring another drink, stopped to stare. "The police? My God, man' you're a hero, not a fugitive!"

He refilled Shannon's glass and sat on the other end of the sofa. "Landing a jerry-rigged job like the *Flora* so close to your destination was a neat bit of navigation. How did you manage, with so many instruments smashed?"

"Close?" Shannon repeated. It hadn't been close; he had been lucky to hit the right hemisphere. From Denver to—

Caution stopped the words in his mouth and substituted a question. "Where did they find the *Flora?*"

Nugent's answer rocked him to his heels. "In a truck farmer's field just outside Boston Metro. There was no way of knowing where you might have gone after landing, but it was assumed that you had caught a lift into Metro from a passing surface car. I imagine that Solar Services heads are waiting impatiently to learn where you spent those two years."

"I was on Io," Shannon said. He was hardly conscious of answering, grappling in confusion with this latest inconsistency.

"*Io!*" Nugent stood up, staring at Shannon. "Ruth!"

Ruth came out of the kitchen, her face flushed a little from the heat, a dish cloth in her hands. "I heard it. He spent two years on Io—it's incredible, if it's true."

The significance of the look that passed between them brought Shannon out of his absorption. He set his glass aside, alert.

"You've been there? What's so strange about my having been marooned on Io for two years?"

"Unusual would be a better word," Dace Nugent said. "Io is a wild and terrible place—we were there four years ago, on a tentative exploration for radioactives, and it's hard to believe that an Earthman could exist unarmed in such an environment for two weeks, let alone for two years."

At another time it might have been convincing, but not now. Their sudden interest was only another piece added to the senseless puzzle.

"I think you're lying to suit your own purposes," Shannon said. He stood up, his irritation fanned to sudden anger. "I don't know what you're working toward, but it doesn't matter—I've heard nothing but lies and defeatism and pointless dramatics since I came back, and I'm sick of it."

He let his empty glass drop and turned to go. The door opened against his hand, and Alec Blair came into the room.

Blair was still wearing his soiled shop clothing, but his sandy hair had been brushed and his blunt-featured face freshly shaved. Shannon met the steady regard of the superintendent's light eyes and felt a belligerent suspicion behind it that matched his own.

"Get out of my way," Shannon said.

The whiskey he had drunk warmed him, sent a hot surge of recklessness through him. He wanted suddenly to wipe out his impatience in action, to get his hands on something he could twist and break and exhaust his damned-up anger upon.

BLAIR closed the door behind him. "I thought you were coming along to conquer the new world for us. Don't tell me you've lost your nerve!"

"It's not a matter of nerve," Shannon said. His anger grew, burning the higher because he recognized it for what it was, an emotional reflex working hard to deny his uncertainty. "It's a matter of doing what I can to straighten out the mess that fools and cowards have made by tolerating these damned Cubes."

Ruth Nugent came toward him, her eyes angry. "You're behaving like a child," she said. "You've set yourself against a thing that can't be fought, and you're shouting at us to bolster your

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own courage. I think you're afraid, Shannon—afraid to face the truth."

He felt his face go hot. "And I think you're a bunch of spineless defeatists. When Earth is in trouble, your only solution is to run for your own safety, like rats leaving a sinking ship."

She bit her lip, her color ebbing. "Not that . . . you don't think we would desert my mother, do you, if anything could have been done?"

She was suddenly uncertain and defenseless, her hard competence shattered to reveal a softness that Shannon found infinitely appealing. But his anger had swept him too far; he wanted to let it go before he hurt her further, and did not know how.

"Wouldn't you?" he asked.

Blair's hand on his shoulder swung him around. "You've said enough, Shannon. Get out."

Shannon caught Blair's wrist and jerked him off balance, flung him crashing to the floor at Ruth Nugent's feet.

"I didn't ask to be brought here," he said. "I think your stellar migration scheme is a fool's errand, and I don't want any part of it, now or ever."

When he slammed the door behind him they stared at each other helplessly. Alec Blair got up from the floor, his blunt face ruddy with anger, and brushed at his clothing.

Ruth Nugent went to him quickly and put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't take it seriously, Alec, please. He would have been an unsettling influence if he had joined us—I'm glad he's gone."

Blair said shortly, "The man's a damned irresponsible neurotic."

Nugent shook his head. "I don't think so. Have you considered how you would feel if you had come home from two years of hell to find your fiancée as good as dead, and nobody doing anything about anything? You'd be on edge too, Alec."

They stood together, denying him silently. Nugent sighed and packed his pipe. "The fact remains that we still need him, whether you like him or not. He'll be back when he learns what he's up against—if he doesn't get himself killed in the meantime."

They let it rest at that.

V

OUTSIDE the Nugent plant Shannon flagged a turbobus and rode back to Boston Suburban. The anger in him had not lessened; he let it take its course, feeling a measure of relief in the near violence he had forced. He felt a brief shame when he remembered Ruth Nugent's stricken look, and banished it by turning his full attention again to the dilemma in which he found himself.

He was no nearer a solution than before; instead of discovering a thread of sense in the fantastic business, he felt himself sinking deeper into a quagmire of senseless contradiction. Only one certainty emerged—before he could help Ellen he would have to learn what the actual situation was, and he could trust only one person on earth to tell him the truth.

He had mapped out a tentative first step by the time the bus entered the neatly ordered shopping section of Boston Suburban. It would be of no use to go directly to Gil's old apartment; Gil would not be there, else the fat man would not have answered his call from Colorado. There was no information to be gained there, and Shannon's appearance would only clinch his own uncertainty.

At an intersection a block above the Suburban shuttle terminal he left the turbobus, and the comet-topped spire of the local Solar Services building soaring up ahead of him reminded him that he had two years of accumulated salary awaiting his claim.

It was as good a place to start as any. He needed money as well as information, and Solar Services would have both.

He went up the broad ramp and through the marble archway with an uneasy conviction that he would be stopped again as he had been stopped

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in Denver. But there was no one waiting under the arch nor in the spacious lobby beyond. He went through the busy first floor with its rows of information and ticket cubicles and its banks of radophone booths, and entered one of a dozen elevators leading to the administration levels above. The feeling of being on familiar ground made him almost cheerful until the cage slid into upward motion and he noticed the attendant for the first time.

The operator was a gray-clad Cubist.

The man waited patiently, smiling, hand ready upon the ranked selector buttons. "Your floor, sir?"

"Ninth," Shannon said. His throat felt dry, constricted. Uncertainty raked him, undermining his ingrained confidence in Solar's integrity when he recalled the disjointed gabble of the visinews machine he had heard earlier at the Boston Metro terminal.

"You're a Cubist," Shannon said bluntly. "So Solar Services *is* hiring your kind now."

The man nodded, his serenity unshaken. "Solar Services employs more of us than any other major utility, sir."

The elevator sighed to a stop. The cage door opened. Outside stretched a carpeted corridor, softly lighted, smooth walls broken at regular intervals by frosted office doors.

"I had the privilege of seeing your appearance on the late morning visinews, Mr. Shannon," the operator said. "We understand your bitterness over the changes that have taken place, but we have every confidence that you will feel differently when you know the Cubes better."

Shannon stared. "*My* appearance? But I haven't—"

He went out of the elevator without finishing, heading down the corridor toward a door marked *Salaried Personnel.* Nothing was to be learned from a Cubist lift operator; the information he needed lay ahead, behind that frosted door.

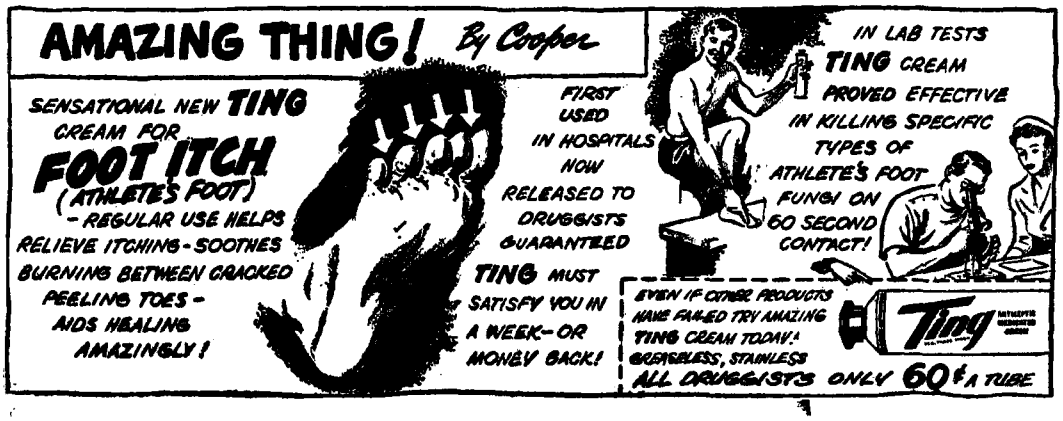
ENTERING the office, he felt the instant hush that fell across the long, busy room. Accounting machines ceased their clicking of relays. The muted hum of radophone conversations, carried on by a hundred intent clerks, fell sharply quiet. Half the personnel were Cubists.

A tall blonde girl with a personal secretary's unmistakable air of efficiency rose and came toward him from a desk beside an inner door marked *M. Clayton Manager.*

"Mr. Clayton is expecting you," she said impersonally. "Will you follow me, please?"

He followed, and forgot her immediately when the man at the desk inside rose. Clayton was a short, heavy man with a smoothly bald head and light, cold eyes. He did not offer his hand to Shannon; instead he placed a manicured forefinger upon a newspaper spread

[*Turn page*]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across his desk and raised his voice sharply.

"Now that you've condescended to visit us, Shannon, will you trouble yourself to explain this 'interview' you gave to the press without the sanction of your employers?"

Shannon took up the printed page, his eyes racing over its narrow columns. A quarter-page cut of himself stared back at him, the face set and angry. Headlines over the picture said blackly:

RETURNED SOLAR SERVICES ENGINEER SHOCKED BY CHANGES, DENOUNCES CUBIST TREND

There was more underneath, a terse, semantically faultless account of his appearance in Boston Metro at ten o'clock of the same morning, and of the trenchant attack upon Cubism he had made to representatives of Interworld Visicasts.

He had identified himself satisfactorily, but had made no statement as to where he had been during the past two years—a circumstance carefully noted in the report. With mounting anger he had detailed the fate of his fiancée, and had called upon all those citizens who had suffered similar losses to demand action by World Council to halt the spread of Cubism. He had even gone so far as to advocate force if sufficient voting pressure could not be brought to bear. The Workers' Guild, he had declared, showed the only real awareness of danger he had met with—let all responsible citizens support its efforts to cope with the Cubist menace. . . .

There were side columns referring to the main story, with commentators' speculations as to the real motives behind his attack and uneasy predictions as to the possible effect of his incendiary pronouncements upon an already agitated public.

Shannon scanned the entire lot, appalled, and found the result damning.

They had been ahead of him again, maneuvering him to their own ends. Whatever he might have done as a free agent had been forestalled; he was committed, and no matter what he said he would not be believed.

He put down the paper and looked up to meet Clayton's icy glare.

"It would do no good to deny giving the interview," he said. "And since the opinions stated are essentially the same as my own, I see no reason why I should. I think the world has gone mad."

THE Solar Services manager flushed an angry red. "You had no right to make such statements unadvised, Shannon. You've overstepped yourself badly—as of this minute you are no longer employed by Solar Services, and I think you'll find it a difficult matter to land an engineer's berth with any other syndicate."

Shannon was mildly amazed to find how far two years of fighting an inexorable environment on his own resources had undermined his respect for authority. Solar Services, once the unquestioned arbiter of his opinion and action, was in the turn of a moment only another force arrayed against him.

"I'll get along," he said. "It happens that I've come for the salary built up during my enforced absence. I'll be quite happy to take it and go."

In spite of himself he felt a touch of bitter humor at the apoplectic tinge of Clayton's face. "I've had two years to arrive at the exact figure due me. If you'll give me a draft to that amount you can go to the devil—and so can Solar Services."

He had changed more than he suspected, he thought when he left the building with the draft in his pocket and headed for the nearest bank. His break with Solar Services was a thing totally unforseen, yet now that it was done the fact of his unemployment mattered less to him than getting to the bottom of the trick by which it had been brought about.

Someone had impersonated him that morning. Someone had used his identity to give an interview to the press, a statement of his position that could

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never be canceled. He had been separated neatly from his job, and identified publicly and irrevocably as an enemy of the Cubes. . . .

And he had become known as a supporter of the Guild in its campaign against the Cubes.

He cursed himself on the instant for not having recognized earlier the practiced hand that had manipulated him like a puppet from behind the scenes. If the Guild was powerful enough to present the only organized opposition to the Change that sapped Earth like a virus, then it was also a faction strong enough to cover his actions from the police and to maneuver him, without his knowledge or consent, into championing its convictions.

Paradoxically, the realization that he had been systematically duped did not bring anger, but relief. There was, after all, a pattern of logic running through and supporting the whole improbable muddle. Once he found Gil Lucas and got closer to the truth, he might be able to break out of the rut into which he had fallen and act on his own initiative instead of being marched like a marionette through a routine already determined for him.

The bank, when he reached it, was closed for the afternoon.

He hesitated at the intersection, pondering his next step, restless eyes aimlessly searching the busy thoroughfare before him. His attention kept returning unaccountably to a narrow white building across the street, a simple facade that stood out in unadorned simplicity against its garishly neoned neighbors, and he felt a sudden cold shock of excitement when he realized what it was.

The opaque glassite front bore no advertising display. There was no identification at all except a small greenish block that fluoresced faintly even in the afternoon sunshine, and a single word chiseled below it in the masonry above the double-dored entrance—

Sanctuary.

There would be a Cube inside.

He went directly across the street, reckless of honking surface traffic, his whole awareness centered about the fact that here within his reach, at last, was a Cube.

HE HAD to face them sooner or later. Why not now?

It seemed to him when he mounted the opposite curb that the hurrying crowd slowed fractionally before the Sanctuary, that every face for the moment wore a transient look of peace. A little knot of spectators watched from one side, some curious, some only casually interested and restless. A smaller group stood apart from them, tense and uncertain, watching the double doors with a fixity that ignored outside sound and motion.

As Shannon approached, a shabby old man with unkempt white hair and a time-ravaged face detached himself from the smaller group and limped resolutely up to the arched entrance. The double doors swung open, and the old man was gone into an inner gloom lighted faintly by a far, green luminescence. The doors closed without sound; Shannon felt, rather than heard, the sigh that now swept through the watching crowd.

He was within arm's reach of the door when he felt it—a soothing aura of euphoric contentment that reminded him forcibly of the quality he had felt first in the Garricks and later in Ellen Keyne and her mother.

Contentment, peace, serenity—and utter resignation.

He halted under the archway, fighting against a growing conviction that he had been upon the point of making a horrible mistake, that there was no evil inside but a blessed relief from all the uncertainties that had plagued him. He had been wrong from the beginning in his surging resentment against the Cubes. . . .

At the same time he was dimly aware that the crowd watched him with cat-

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and-mouse intensity. The weight of their regard brought with it a counter certainty that all this was nothing new to them, that they had seen others come before him to struggle for their identity before those enigmatic double doors. . . .

Slowly the doors swung open.

VI

AN OLD man in a plain gray robe stood in the opening, pale face smiling apologetically—an attendant, a Servant of the Cubes. Behind him in the gloom of the Sanctuary the greenish glow seemed impossibly far away for so small a room. Robed figures moved before it, dimming the light in passing, and among them Shannon glimpsed the man who had entered before him, walking erect and free, a child's eager smile upon his face.

"I am sorry," the servant said. "Some few are not acceptable to the Cubes. You are one of the wild ones."

His eyes swept the crowd outside. "Is there anyone else?"

No one moved. The Servant stepped back; the doors closed after him.

From behind him Shannon heard the concerted sigh of long-held breath. A murmur ran through the spectators, surprised, excited.

Anger grew in him, shearing like a sharp blade through the compulsion that had held him. He took a step forward, reaching out a rough hand toward the doors.

At his shoulder a voice said authoritatively: "No one enters a Sanctuary without invitation. The Cubes are under civil protection."

He turned to face a policeman, a massive young man in the trim green uniform of the civil corps. The officer's eyes were wary, and he held a shock-rod ready.

Shannon fought his impatience, considering the certainty that force would earn him nothing but trouble. Later—

The crowd parted abruptly, making way for two men in civilian clothing. The taller one held an open wallet in his hand, extended for the officer's inspection; the other carried a shock-rod.

"Government operatives," the tall one said. "We've had this man under observation for some time. We're ready to take him now."

Shannon sensed their intention too late—the electric-blue beam of the small man's shock-rod caught him and convulsed him with the stunning agony of total neural disorganization. There was a terrible instant of plunging bodilessly into nothing, and then blackness claimed him. . . .

When he opened his eyes the glare of light was intolerable. Someone stood over him, blurred and indistinct, holding a pungent drink to his lips. There was a confused sound of voices in the background, and the brittle rustling of a newspaper.

". . . would have resisted and been detained if we hadn't stepped in," a voice said. It added, wonderingly: "The odd thing is that the Servant refused him entrance . . . the Cube-field didn't hamper him at all, even under the archway."

The light, dry voice of the man above him was instantly and hearteningly familiar. "You shouldn't have used the shock-rod, though. He's not going to thank us for that."

Shannon got his hands under him and tried to sit up. "Gil Lucas," he said thickly. "Gil!—how in God's name did you get mixed up in this?"

His vision cleared and he saw his friend as he had pictured him to the Kyril, in exile, a thousand times—a plump man of thirty, round-faced and incongruously stooped, with receding straw-blond hair and thick spectacles glinting over light, restless eyes. At the moment he was smiling, showing large square teeth set a little apart, and there was about him like an aura a feel of suppressed energy and spring-tense, dynamic intelligence.

He placed the glass in Shannon's hands, his touch sure and gentle. "Drink

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this, fellow. It should ease the neural reaction."

THE ACRID drink cleared Shannon's head, and he saw that he was propped upon a cushion lounge in the living room of an expensively appointed apartment, a place of thick rugs and subdued paintings and heavy drapes that framed tall windows with a suggestion of affluence.

"It's a devious story," Gil Lucas said. "And not a pretty one."

He looked at his strap watch and spoke to the two men waiting behind him. "Get out. I don't want you here when the great man arrives."

They went, showing no resentment at his tone. Shannon sat up, wariness returning with his strength.

"The great man?"

"Zimmer Conniston," Gil said. "High Chairman of the Free Guilds, politically one of the three most powerful men on Earth and a pragmatist without peer—as proof of which I cite his wisdom in choosing me to head the only research project in existence dedicated to the destruction of the Cubes."

Some time later they sat facing each other, smoking and rattling the ice in their drinks, relaxing in the warmth of reunion. Dusk had fallen, staining the sky outside with a prismatic city-glow. Through the open windows floated the busy hum of the city itself, a murmurous rhythm like the purring of a vast, sleeping beast.

"You'll understand how I felt when I found Ellen," Shannon said. "The world seemed to have gone mad. What really happened, Gil? What is behind all this, and what can be done about it?"

Gil put down his drink, his round face sober.

"I wish I could answer that, Paul, but we're fighting a thing more dangerous to work with at close range than radioactives. We've spent Conniston's money like water, and learned nothing that we didn't know already, because there's no basis for experiment. I've nothing to show for my own work but a nagging premonition—you'd call it a hunch, and you'd be right—so wild that even a telemovie horror show wouldn't touch it."

He shook himself and gave Shannon his familiar crooked grin. "The truth is that I'm afraid, because if the hunch should prove right there would be no hope at all. Sometimes I think Dace Nugent has the right idea with his *Ark*, that we ought to run for it."

"Nugent is a damned defeatist," Shannon said. "You've been too close to this thing, that's all. . . What are the Cubes, really? Didn't anyone test them, run off a lab analysis?"

"The first ones were tested. They turned up all over Earth about twenty months ago, out of nowhere, and the first to be brought to laboratories got a routine examination. We've assumed that they are intelligent in themselves or are activated extensions of another intelligence, but the first analyses didn't show it, and there weren't any more. They checked out as ordinary fluorspar."

"Fluorspar?"

"I've seen the original test data, Paul. They're fluorspar—simple cubic forms, none perfectly symmetrical, all giving up the usual colloidal impurities of manganese and rare earths. They fluoresce in ultraviolet, have a hardness of 4 and a specific gravity of 3.2, and they fit the normal patterns of interpenetrating calcium-fluorine lattices.

"As for their being alive, there's a corresponding analogy in carbon-based organisms—a human body, for instance, is the same an instant after death as it was before, physically and chemically, except that the intangible activating spark is gone. We don't know what life *is*, yet; how can we say what forms can possess it?

"The lab men found nothing unusual in their tests, until the Change hit them. Then they passed the Cubes up to higher authorities, and the things really woke up and went to work. They passed from hand to hand, contaminating every mind they touched, and the best scientific

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brains of the world became their Servants.

"As soon as the Change was an acknowledged fact our top-ranking specialists refused to go near the Cubes, but they woke up too late. Today not more than a hundred able scientists are left, and they are mostly mathematicians and astronomers, the sort who carry on their research at long distance."

"It was deliberate, then," Shannon said. "You think they put our top research men out of the way by converting them, before they started spreading their new gospel?"

GIL nodded wearily. "That's what we think, but proving it to the Government is a different matter. One of the evils of universal democracy is that nothing the people want can be suppressed, and the Cubist faction has grown so fast that they already represent a heavy voting power. The real hitch is that everybody has an axe to grind—politicians, syndicates, even the Government itself—and they're trying to use the Cubists, not understanding that it's only a matter of time until everyone will have made the Change and their own personal axes will go into the scrap heap for good. That's why my group is willing to work with a strongarm tactician like Conniston, because there isn't much time left and because Conniston's Guild is the only element willing to do anything about it."

He stood up and stretched, yawning. "If the Cubes are working a Trojan Horse trick, it's going damned well. And fast. We—"

He broke off, his glance following the coded flashing of an annunciator bulb over the door.

"You'll learn the why of your being pulled into this now," Gil said. "From the great man himself. Here comes Conniston."

The door opened. A small man entered, carrying a dart-gun alertly, obviously clearing the way.

After him came Conniston.

Conniston came in on the heels of his guard, ignoring Shannon and Lucas, and went directly to the automix bar in the corner. He was a huge, lowering man past middle age, with stiff white hair bristling over a square-jowled face and a ponderous body running to fat. Shannon watched him curiously, sensing the animal force and the blunt, brutal arrogance behind his frowning preoccupation.

"You couldn't buy MacLeod off," Gil Lucas said. "I thought not."

Conniston turned on him with the drink half poured. "Orsham and his Solar Services crowd got to him first. It doesn't matter—I can do without MacLeod and his Board."

Gil shrugged and looked at Shannon. "Wilson MacLeod is Chairman of Economic Stabilization; Conniston had the idea that he could use him to swing the rest of the Board against Government acceptance of the Cubists as a recognized labor element, but it didn't work out that way. I warned him it wouldn't, because the financial weight was on the other side."

Conniston's guard moved unobtrusively to a corner of the room facing the door and lounged against a chair, his dart-gun held in casual readiness. Conniston drew a cigar from a jacket pocket and tapped it alight, his pale eyes considering Gil Lucas.

"I warned you from the beginning that this thing couldn't be handled like an ordinary political skirmish," Gil said. "It's not even a matter of economics, at root. It's a technical problem that must be evaluated and understood before it can be solved. We've got to learn how the Cubes work and why, and be able to get at them without stirring up a civil disturbance that will bring Government down on us."

Conniston clamped the cigar in his mouth. "There's only one way left," he said through a curl of smoke. "And I'm about ready to use it. Force."

"I knew you'd settle on that line eventually," Gil said. He shook his head,

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light glinting on his thick lenses. "Force won't work, Conniston—bombing the Sanctuaries and Peace Centers will kill thousands of innocent people, and when the smoke clears the Cubes won't have been touched. You'll make martyrs of the Cubists and turn public opinion against the Free Guilds for good."

"You had your chance to do something," Conniston said. "You and your long-haired theorists. But you didn't learn anything, you only spent money. I'm through marking time, Lucas. From now on you're out of it."

UNEXPECTEDLY, Gil laughed. "We foresaw this from the first, of course. Predicting your reactions was never hard, Conniston — you started your career as a muscler, and you can't shake the conviction that force is the answer to every problem. It isn't. You can't win without us."

"You underestimate me," Conniston said. He nodded to his guard, who stood up expectantly, dart-gun ready. "Did you forsee this, too?"

Gil finished his drink without haste.

"Of course. It's no wonder Orsham has beaten you consistently—your psychology dates straight back to the Paleolithic. We took it for granted that when our research failed to show quick results, and an immediate solution was impossible from the beginning, that you'd try to eliminate us. When you can't use us any longer we're dangerous —we know too much.

Conniston settled his thick shoulders like a wrestler guarding against an expected grip. "Then you're a fool, Lucas. You waited too long to pull out."

"We've been prepared against this for weeks, Gil said. "There's a portable tapecaster unit hidden in your automix bar, Conniston. Every word of this conversation is already on file, in the hands of my staff. Shannon and I are not Cubist nonentities—if we fail to turn up tomorrow the whole story will go to the Government, and even a High Chairman of the Guilds will have trouble smoothing over our disappearance."

Conniston reached the automix in two ponderous strides, bottles and glasses clattering when he thrust in a hand and brought out the flat metal oblong of the tapecaster unit. He scowled at it and, in sudden fury, smashed it to the floor with a jangle of broken vacuum tubes.

"Get out, Lucas," he said thickly. "You're clear as long as you keep your mouth shut." His glance included Shannon, ominously. "One word of this and you'll wish you had stayed on Io."

Gil got up quickly. "Let's go, Paul, before the great man changes his mind."

"Wait," Shannon said. "I've some explanations coming, first."

He turned on Conniston. "You used my identity this morning to give a false interview to the press, an interview that cost me my job with Solar Services. I don't care about the job, but I want the truth about that affair in Colorado—who was the fat man who intercepted my call to Gil, and how did the men he sent to meet me happen to have my suit and wallet ready in Denver?"

"Denver?" Conniston repeated. His heavy face went slack with astonishment. "Wallet? I don't know what you're talking about. I never heard of you until the newscasts carried your story this morning."

Gil caught Shannon's arm. "We'll have to look deeper than Conniston to find the people behind that Denver business, Paul. The interview this morning was pure opportunism."

Shannon went reluctantly, sensing that Conniston's surprise was to real to be feigned. Conniston was a devious enough tactician after his fashion, but he had not been responsible for the web of inconsistencies into which Shannon had fallen. The knowledge left Shannon as much in the dark as ever, shaken again by his old uncertainty.

The elevator Gil chose in the hallway dropped them smoothly to the lobby, but they did not leave the cage. Instead Gil shot it up again, this time to the roof.

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FROM the roof the night was cool and clear, shot through with the prismatic twinklings of stars flung like diamond dust across the sky. The moon, just rising, laid a smooth patina of yellow light over the helicopter waiting for them on the landing.

Shannon stepped back, startled, when the machine's side port slid open and the pilot said urgently: "Get in. They're waiting on the street to follow you in a surface car, but Conniston may think to call a copter any minute."

They were in the air before they were well seated. "This is Vince Harris, Paul," Gil said. "One of my staff. A physicist, and a good one."

The pilot nodded, too busy to speak, and shot them, lightless and swift, across the glow and darkness of Boston Metro. The copter cabin hummed gently to the purring of turbomotor exhaust above them, a sound too faint to drown out completely the restless night murmur of the city.

They looked back once from a distance to see another copter rise from the roof they had left, searchlights stabbing the darkness while it circled futilely. Gil Lucas met Shannon's eye and grinned faintly when it gave up the hunt and settled back again.

"We're taking you to our research headquarters," he said. "Not the one we set up to satisfy Conniston, though it was his money that built it. You'll meet the rest of my staff there, and if you like the setup we'll find a job for you."

Shannon was watching the city lights slipping past below like star-points reflected in dark water, thinning and dimming as the copter left the metropolitan area behind.

"That's the second offer I've had today to join a world-saving crusade," he said. "I think I like the sound of your project better than I liked Nugent's. At least you're fighting."

Gil looked at him narrowly. "Is it Nugent's project that rubs you wrong, Paul, or his daughter? I've met her a couple of times, and she's one to linger in a man's mind for a long, long time."

"I hadn't considered it," Shannon said. "But you may be right."

He sat quietly while the copter dipped and sank into darkness, sorting out his thoughts and trying to assess them honestly. Memory of Ruth Nugent's deep-breasted roundness came back to him vividly, and he considered soberly the quick changes of mood he had seen in her during the short time they had been together. The serious tant of her dark head while Dace Nugent explained his project; her impatience with Shannon's refusal to join it; the stricken softness of her when she had spoken of leaving her mother behind. . . .

"I think it's more resentment than attraction," Shannon said. "I keep thinking of her and of Ellen at the same time, and it's an unfair comparison—now. Ellen was like that once, before she gave up waiting for me and went to that damned Sanctuary."

"You make a dubious point," Gil said. "I wonder if Ruth Nugent would have given up? She hasn't, so far."

The machine settled, bouncing a little, and the port opened. Gil caught Shannon's arm, forestalling his answer. "End of the line, Paul. Let's get inside while Vince hides the copter."

The building was a hulking old warehouse of concrete, relic of another day and time, its dark windows shuttered and barred. They left Harris pushing the copter under a shed in the darkness and went inside to glaring light.

VII

THE central room was a huge shaft, open from concrete floor to sheet-metal roof, a place loud with the clang of tools and bright with the flare of sodium floodlamps swung on movable beams. In the center area men in overalls clustered busily about two small bullet-shaped ships, unconventionally designed craft that might have been intended either for atmosphere or for space.

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Other men in laboratory smocks worked at benches along the walls, wiring and testing electronic equipment totally unfamiliar to Shannon. At one end of the room the fantastically complex integration panel of a positronic calculator winked and flickered with colored lights, its great sprawling bulk dominated by a small stooped man with mild spectacled eyes and a pointed, white beard.

"The staff," Gil said. The pride in his voice denied his flippancy. "Heroes all—five research specialists and twenty-two technicians with their fingers in the dike, trying to save humanity from its own stupidity."

He hailed a redhaired young man in stained coveralls who came toward them, a metered test appliance in his hands. "Max Goff, Paul Shannon. . . .Max, will you show Paul around? I've got some progress checks to make."

Shannon yawned. Weariness numbed him suddenly like an opiate, dimming his vision and clouding his awareness.

"Wait," he said. "All this is out of my field. I'd end the tour as ignorant as I began it."

He yawned again, and, annoyed, tried to remember when he had last slept. The improbable truth was startling.

"My God, I haven't slept for four days," he said. "Except for catnaps on the way in from Io, that is. . . .I'll settle for a bunk just now, and look your plant over later."

Gil laughed. "Take him upstairs and put him to bed, Max, before we have to carry him up." He moved away, engrossed at once in the work going on at the nearest bench.

Max Goff gave Shannon a speculative look. "You're the Shannon we heard on the visicasts. Are you coming in with us against the Cubes?"

"The interview was a fake," Shannon sad. "Yes, I'm joining Gil in this. We've been friends since our school days."

They went across the busy workroom toward a freight elevator that slotted the wall beyond the central shaft. On their way they passed close by the two squat ships, and Shannon felt a flicker of returning interest.

"I never saw a design like that," he said. "What are they intended for?"

Goff laughed, pleased. "They're my babies, until they're finished. We expect to need a couple of really fast space craft before this insane Cubist business is ended, so we're adapting Dace Nugent's stellar flight principle to power these. Propulsion is gained through opposition of two conflicting gravitic fields in a mass-magnetic—"

"Nugent's principle?" Shannon interrupted. They entered the empty lift and closed the grill that sent it automatically upward. "I had the idea that Nugent was keeping that pretty well to himself, that he didn't want it duplicated for fear of being followed."

Goff looked embarrassed. "As a matter of fact, we stole it from him. We couldn't let a thing like that be lost out

[*Turn page*]

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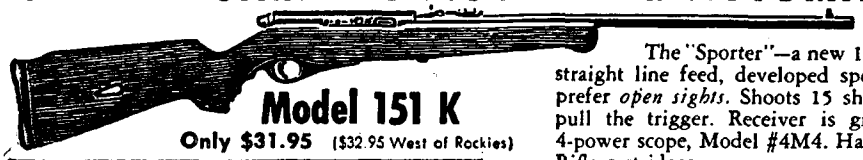

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around 61 Cygni, when we need it so desperately. . .not that we're interested in stellar flight ourselves, but we can use it to good advantage here until this Cubist row is settled. And when the time comes it should revolutionize solar travel—it's far more efficient than atomics, since it operates from the gravitic strains that permeate all space, and its limiting factor is just short of the speed of light. We've finished one ship, a four-man job, and the other should be ready within a matter of days."

They went out of the elevator into a bare plank-walled corridor, and Shannon yawned again. Max Goff opened a door down the hall and snapped on a light. "We're well supplied with living quarters, since we don't go out except in emergencies. This is yours."

LEFT alone, Shannon sat on the edge of the bed and dug out his cigarettes, grimacing a little when he remembered that they were the same the stratoplane stewardess had given him on the flight from Denver to Boston Port. He considered the little plastiwrap package somberly, mulling over the things that had happened to him since then, but he never reached the point of shaking out and lighting a cigarette.

He fell asleep first. . . .

His dream was a thing of fantasy and cold terror, an exhaustion-induced nightmare that left him shivering and sweating when he awoke.

It seemed that he was suspended high above a city whose every detail was clear to him in spite of its distance, a place of great airy buildings and curving streets and green, spacious parks. People thronged the walks, the avenues flowed like bright arteries with traffic; it was a city of peace and comfort, yet there was in it a psychic abnormality that alarmed him more than a physical threat.

For there were in the lines of every structure a skeletal suggestion of cubical articulation, an underlying alien motif that brought him a sharp unease. The people in the streets moved too slowly; where there should have been haste there was none, and the faces he saw, vanishingly small but microscopically clear, smiled without ceasing.

Fear came upon him first when he sensed that the people moved in a definite pattern, with an ordered precision that bore them here and there like chips upon a running stream along a course already determined, never hurrying and never slacking pace. Bound together in some invisible manner, they formed a whole that linked itself mysteriously with the wholes of other cities across the horizon. And beyond those. . . .

He grew aware of another place coexistent with the city, not a part of it but superimposed upon it after the illogical fashion of nightmares—a desolate jumble of volcanic mountains among whose splintered igneous crags hovered a familiar domed figure, gray-green and brooding.

"You have lost touch with your world, Paul Shannon," the Kyril said. *"There may be times when you will wish that you had remained here. . . ."*

It studied the city with an eyeless intensity, and Shannon, finding himself beside it, saw that the people in the streets were looking up toward him without pausing in their course. Panic gripped him when he found every passing face familiar.

Ellen Keyne and her mother passed below, hand in hand, tiny upturned faces smiling. After them came the blonde stewardess of the stratoplane, and on her heels followed the two men who had met him at the Solar building in Denver.

And after them came a fat man with small pale eyes and carefully brushed gray hair, whose face Shannon had last seen on a radophone screen in Brighton, and in his hands he carried a little square case that held the answer to everything.

The fat man, of them all, did not smile. He caught Shannon's eye and raised the little box like one beginning a ritual, opening it. . . .

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SHANNON woke, shaken to the roots of his sanity, to lie sweating and trembling until composure returned to him slowly. He had recovered his discarded cigarettes and was smoking thoughtfully when the corridor door opened and Gil Lucas came in.

"I was beginning to wonder," Gil said, "whether you were asleep or dead. I'm still not too sure."

Shannon got up and stretched, putting the disturbing dream out of his mind. "I'm alive—and starved."

Gil laughed. "You should be. You slept the clock around."

The knowledge of time wasted irritated Shannon. "I wish you'd wakened me. I planned to see Ellen again today, now that I'm over the first shock of what has happened. Gil, somehow, I've got to find a way to bring her out of that Cubist trance. Has it ever been done?"

"Whatever it is, the Change is irrevocable," Gil said. He took Shannon's elbow firmly. "We've knocked off for supper downstairs. Come on—you can talk about the Cubes later."

The improvised dining nall downstairs was crowded, the cheery bustle of hungry technicians making the threat they worked against seem remote and improbable. Shannon found himself ravenously hungry, but too restless after his uneasy sleep to relax and join them immediately.

Just inside the doorway he paused, troubled by a sourceless premonition.

"I want a radophone, Gil. I've got to call Ellen."

Gil shrugged. "There's one in my office, second door to your right down the corridor. Don't set up our return identity code when you call. We're on a masked circuit here, and don't want it traced."

The radophone was a standard unit, operating normally in spite of the illegal extra circuits that kept it from exchange listings. The Keyne address code flickered across its screen under Shannon's fingers, blanking out at once when the call was taken.

Shannon's uneasiness mounted when Myra Keyne's placid face appeared.

"Ellen," he demanded. "Is Ellen all right?"

Her answer stunned him. "Ellen has been transferred to Ohio Peace Center for assignment—the Servants called for her this afternoon. I wish you had called earlier, Paul. Ellen would have liked seeing you before she went."

"Transferred?" he repeated dumbly. "Assignment?"

His dream came back, and with a cold certainty of disaster. He remembered Ellen's upturned, smiling face, and felt again that she was moving, or being moved, inevitably along a course already set for her.

"There was a call for you earlier from a Mr. Nugent, who hoped to find you here," Myra Keyne said. "He asked that you call him when you—wait, Paul, someone is at the door—"

"Stay where you are," Shannon said sharply. "I'm coming over!"

He turned and ran without waiting to cut the connection, through the echoing hallway and across the cluttered workroom and out into the night. The helicopter that had brought him waited empty and dark, under its concealing shed. He had it in the air within seconds, spearing through the darkness toward Boston Suburban.

THE Keyne neighborhood was not hard to find from the air, but the inevitable small delays of locating key arterial avenues chafed Shannon's patience. He came down out of the night recklessly when he found the right intersection, disregarding the flutter of aerial traffic, and set the copter down on the Keyne lawn.

The curious stares of neighbors silhouetted against lighted doorways up and down the street told him that he was too late even before he saw the wrecked surface car.

It leaned drunkenly against the brick porch steps, a crumpled bulk of scorched metal, the thin trickle of leaking fuel

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tinkling loud in the stillness. Shannon ran past it up the steps and into the house.

At the archway of the connecting hall that separated the living room from the rest of the house he caught himself barely in time to avoid stumbling over Myra Keyne's body. She lay in a small, quiet heap, her gray Cubist gown torn and disarranged, her dead face serene and utterly content.

A sound of movement sent Shannon into the hall way beyond to see Ruth Nugent at the radophone unit, her fingers busy with a half-completed calling code on its screen.

"*You*," Shannon said. "What are you doing here? Who did this?"

She turned a strained face toward him, her eyes dark and enormous with shock. She had exchanged the brown coveralls in which he had first seen her for evening wear, a full-length white dress cut low at the shoulders under a short dark jacket with huge iridescent buttons. The change in her was startling; the conventional clothing made her seem softer, more feminine and somehow less imperious.

"I came here to find you," she said. The fright went out of her eyes, and her chin tilted defiantly. "My father called this afternoon without finding you. Tonight he sent me."

She came toward him, forgetting the unfinished radophone setting, and he saw that her hair was disarranged and that her jacket was torn, disclosing an ugly blue bruise across the bare shoulder beneath.

Her eyes darkened again at sight of Myra Keyne's body under the archway, and she drew back a little. "Zimmer Conniston's men did that, I don't know why. I recognized one of them—we had trouble with the Guild when we first opened our shops again to build the *Ark*, and this man was one of their musclers. They—"

He cut her short, impatiently. "You're wasting time. Start at the beginning, will you?"

The whine of an approaching siren cut the stillness urgently, shrilly incisive.

"I've a copter outside," Shannon said. "We'd better go, while we can."

He lifted the copter from the lawn scant seconds before the lights of a police car swept the house.

ONCE safe in the air, he paused to hear Ruth's explanation. "They were already there when I came, a few minutes ago," she said. "Their copter was on the lawn. . .they came out of the house, running, as I turned into the drive. They didn't hesitate an instant—they just opened fire on my car and disabled it. It crashed into the porch and I. . .I think I must have been unconscious for a few minutes. I can't imagine why they should have killed poor Mrs. Keyne."

"Because she had seen them," Shannon said. "I should have expected something like this, after meeting Conniston. He sent them after Ellen."

"For your fiancée? Why?"

"To shut my mouth," Shannon said. "And through me, to keep Gil Lucas quiet."

He turned the speeding copter away from the approaching lights of Boston Metro and headed back toward Suburban, trying to make a choice from the alternatives left open to him.

"Your father sent you to find me. Why?"

"Because he still wants you on the *Ark*." She made a small sound of disapproval in the darkness. "Alec and I were taking a night off from work, but Father broke up our evening with an emergency call to our theater. Father is afraid that we'll have to advance the *Ark's* blastoff date. Our plant is picketed now—the *Ark* isn't safe there any longer, and neither are we."

"Picketed?"

"Not by the Guild—by Solar Services musclers. Solar has tried from the beginning to break up our stellar project. They've intimidated our construction

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crews and made it hard to get materials, and yesterday Orsham called for a Government injunction to restrain us. It will probably go through now, since they've bought out Chairman MacLeod of Stabilization."

She sighed and relaxed in the copter seat. Her shoulder brushed Shannon's, and she drew away automatically.

"They've reason to fight us, I suppose. Solar is trying desperately to convince Government, and through it the public, that the Cubists are harmless; they want them recognized as a responsible element because an all-Cubist personnel would mean the end of syndicate labor troubles. On the other hand my father preaches that the Cubes are a menace already too strong to be fought, and advertises his stellar colonization project as the only escape from the Change they are bringing. The people listen to him; his opposition has done more to damage Solar's campaign than the Guild has, and Orsham knows it."

"It's a familiar pattern," Shannon said. "If a syndicate can't win with its political and financial weight, it's as ready as the Guilds are to use violence. I've seen it happen before, but I never expected to be caught in it."

The girl touched his arm, her eyes following the serpentine tangle of lighted streets below. "There's the plant. Drop lower and to the right, or you'll overshoot it."

Shannon laughed shortly. "I'm not heading for your plant, Ruth—I'm going to Ohio Peace Center after Ellen."

VIII

WHEN she stiffened indignantly he added, "I'll drop you at a shuttle terminal somewhere. I can't afford the time it would take to convince your father that I won't join his project."

She stifled her resentment with an obvious effort. "But I *must* get back! Please, Shannon—Solar is up to something, or they wouldn't have our plant under surveillance. I've got to get back to my father before something happens."

"And to Alec Blair," Shannon said, and regretted the words instantly.

"Alec and I expect to be married once we've got the *Ark* under way," she said. He felt her eyes on him in the gloom of the copter cabin, weighing him speculatively. "Why shouldn't I want to be with Alec when trouble comes?"

Shannon shrugged. "I'll set you down at your plant in exchange for an equal favor. Is the *Ark* armed?"

"We've a store of small arms, of course. Why?"

"If Conniston sends men to Peace Center for Ellen they'll arrive ahead of me," Shannon said. "That means that I can expect trouble. I'll need a dart-gun or an exploder. Preferably a dart-gun, since it's smaller."

She looked at him searchingly, her eyes puzzled. "You're a strange man, Shannon. You can't bear the thought of being beaten, can you?"

"Your father asked me to join his staff for that reason," Shannon pointed out. "It's a basic law of survival that I never guessed at until I cracked up on Io; if an inanimate thing blocks you, break it—if it's alive, kill it. The lava-lions on Io taught me how effective it is."

She was silent for a time, her face turned toward the lights slipping past below.

"All right," she said presently. "I'll get a weapon for you if you'll take me home. It's nothing to me if you murder Conniston's musclers, or if they murder you."

He banked the copter and sent it down at a steep slant toward the dark huddle of shop buildings, aiming for the faint sheen of light reflected from the *Ark's* polished coppery hull. They were almost above the barbed metal fence guarding the plant grounds when the area lit up suddenly with a great harsh flare of sodium floodlamps.

Shannon, half blinded, fought the controls, yanking the copter back into concealing darkness. Below them he had a glimpse of tiny figures running from the

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shop buildings, converging frantically toward the towering bulk of the *Ark*. Lights came on inside the ship; more tiny figures leaned from open ports, helping the running men to clamber inside.

Other hurrying shadows came out of the night beyond the barbed fence, gathering in a tight knot before the gate. Two of them carried something heavy between them; from it a swift, thin streak of violet fire arced up, passed close by the *Ark* and exploded with a searing white flash against a shop building.

The building vanished, raining a fiery hail of molten debris. One of the running figures staggered and fell within its own length of the ship. The soar and rush of air from the blast reached the copter, throwing it high on a thunderous shock-wave of concussion.

Shannon righted the machine in time to see the wounded man drawn inside by his fellows. The ports snapped shut. The whole polished length of the *Ark* glowed a sudden, sullen red. . . .

It went up swiftly, like a fiery arrow fired against the night. Under its reaction thrust the shop buildings below it ballooned outward and crumpled, crushed like cardboard houses under a giant's heel. A howling wind swept the shop area, gathering dust and debris, tumbling the men outside the fence like twigs.

Far up at the limit of vision the speeding red dot of the ship turned a brilliant electric blue. . .and vanished.

"The light-drive," Ruth Nugent said in a choked voice. "They got away—no one will ever be able to overtake them now!"

A helicopter streaked out of the darkness, circled the broken buildings and settled to disgorge armed, running men. Another followed it, swinging wide before landing.

Shannon turned his own copter at full throttle, driving low to avoid being silhouetted against the sky, and streaked lightless into the night.

BOSTON Metro drew beneath them, a sprawling chromatic disk of light against the dark countryside, and its nearness posed again the need for decision. Shannon let the copter hover, suspended on the faint sighing of spinning blades overhead.

"We're back where we started," he said. "You've missed your ship by minutes. I'm no nearer to Peace Center and Ellen than I was."

She sat quietly, considering. "I don't know what to do. . .Father will send for me when it's safe, if he can find me—but I can't go back to the shops or stay openly in either Metro or Suburban. Solar Services is too powerful an enemy to ignore."

Shannon pondered the courses open to him, and found none satisfactory He could not afford to be burdened further by Ruth Nugent; he had already pulled her out of one ugly situation that was not of his own making, and he felt he owed her nothing. He had to get to Ohio Peace Center quickly before Conniston's musclers found Ellen; and, once there, having this girl to look out for would complicate his task impossibly.

Or would it?

He considered the difficulties ahead, the ordinarily innocuous little encounters made dangerous by his unfamiliarity with the new changes. He had been on Earth only two days; how much was there that he did not know yet, but which Ruth Nugent would know as a matter of course?

"You said your father would send for you later," he said. "That means that the *Ark* is still inside the solar system, within reach of Earth. But where?"

"At our base on—" She broke off and looked at him sharply, weighing her answer. "You may as well know, since we're in this together," she said finally. "Father and Alec agreed long ago to take the *Ark* to Io in case of emergency. The rest of our staff are waiting there with the supplies we've stockpiled for the stellar flight."

He stared at her incredulously. *"Io?*

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You mean you've had a base there all the time?"

Her assent recalled the sudden interest Dace Nugent had shown when Shannon spoke of his two years of shipwreck on the Jovian moon. Shannon had never circled the satellite, small as it was, partly because of the danger and partly because he was reluctant to leave the company of the Kyril. The realization that other men had been on Io during the greater part of his maroonment disconcerted him sharply.

"My God, I needn't have lost those two years at all," he said. The irony of it shook him impotently. "I could have worked my way around to your side and got back to Earth almost at once. . .before Ellen gave me up for lost."

She answered him indirectly, out of her own concerns. "You must have found someone here to help you, else you wouldn't have been able to get a copter tonight. Why can't we go to them?"

HE REALIZED then the predicament into which his headlong impatience had led him, and cursed himself for his heedlessness.

"I can't go to them. I took the copter without permission when I called the Keyne house and found Ellen gone—and I don't know the way back. I don't even know Gil's radophone code. He's working under cover with his staff, searching for a way to fight the Cubes, and they're on an unlisted circuit."

He did not remain uncertain for long. "It doesn't matter. I can't waste time looking for Gil. I'm going on to Peace Center."

"Unarmed, against Conniston's muscles?"

He had already dismissed his lack of a weapon as irremediable. "I'll worry about that later. The problem just now is what to do with you."

"That's no problem," she said. "Since I can't stay here, I'll have to go with you. But I'll keep the bargain we made—a weapon in exchange for my passage."

He weighed her assurance against his own ignorance of the new order and found her offer tempting. "I don't know . . .having you to look after would offset the advantage of being armed, even if you really could find a dart-gun for me."

She laughed suddenly, the first real amusement he had seen in her. "We've each an enemy to hide from, Shannon, and secrecy means as much to you as to me. Suppose I threatened to warn Conniston about your going to Peace Center if you leave me behind?"

He stared at her. "You'd do that?"

She could not resist prodding him. "Remember your Ionian law of survival, Shannon! Why shouldn't it work as well for me as for you?"

He laughed in turn, his resentment vanishing. "There's always that. But what's to prevent my dumping you out of the copter here and now, to keep you quiet?"

"I wondered if you'd think of that. But you won't do it."

He sobered. "Of course not. I'm no murderer."

"And I'm no informer."

"It's a bargain, then. Find a gun for me, and I'll keep you out of Solar's way."

He puzzled briefly over her certainty of him while he dropped the copter on a long slant toward the city below. He could—and would—destroy anything else that blocked his way to Ellen, but he knew without examining his reasons that he would not have harmed this girl. He disagreed violently with the defeatism that allowed her to give up humanity as a lost cause and felt himself obscurely affronted by her assurance, but these were side issues and did not bear on his temporary acceptance of her as a companion.

He was surprised to find, when he considered the new uncertainties ahead, that it was really comforting to have her there beside him in the shadowed copter cabin, to know that he was no longer alone. . . .

"We can't use any of the regular Metro landings," Ruth said. "There's probably a police warning out for us al-

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ready. Head for the docks—they won't expect us there, and it's near enough to Ansel's place."

He turned the copter and swung it into the first darting fringe of aerial metropolitan traffic. Commercial craft droned by, using the higher lanes for speed; a Suburban shuttle lanced past in the darkness with a giddy blurring of lighted windows, red proximity lamps blinking warningly from its wingtips. Shannon switched on the copter's riding lights, realizing that a darkened machine would be more conspicuous in the flow of traffic than a lighted one, and chose a descending lane.

The restless dark mirror of the bay rose under him, pinpointed with a glitter of bobbing lights. "This is Guild territory," Shannon said. "A pretty rough neighborhood after dark. . . Who is this Ansel?"

"A contrabander," Ruth answered. "Solar Services spiked our application to buy Government arms for the *Ark*, so we went underground for them. Government restrictions haven't stopped contrabanding; they've only driven it deeper out of sight, as always."

They circled the wharves twice, looking for a quiet landing away from the termitic bustle of loading and unloading that swarmed the piers.

BELOW them great rusty tankers nosed at moorings, shining greasily in the floodlight glare while they discharged their cargoes of oil through a serpentine maze of piping that snaked through the confusion. Cranes swung loads of barrels and bales; men and machines scurried endlessly, like ants fleeing a violated nest. Tiny patrol boats skittered like water beetles from ship to ship, searchlights stabbing officious fingers into the business of each undertaking.

At the personnel piers men going off shift poured up from shuttling smallboats, hurrying from the frenzied rush of work to the equally frantic entertainmen that waited for them on the waterfront streets. Shannon saw no Cubists among them, and marked their absence.

"There are millions of Cubist seamen," Ruth said, "but they never come ashore because their employers—owners, really—keep them on ship to protect them against footpads and drunken musclers. The poor things would be as helpless as children in a neighborhood like this."

They found a pier deserted because of interrupted repair work and set down the copter in the darker shadow of a lowering warehouse. With the opening of the port the damp, fishy smell of the bay closed in on them, reinforced by the stink of spilled oil and exhaust fumes and rotting refuse from the fruit boats.

An empty ore barge rode at anchor below their pier, turbines quiet while it waited for a return cargo. Its crew clustered about a foaming trough on its deck, their half-naked bodies glistening under the harbor lights, busy at washing their clothing. They sang while they worked. a calm slow harmony that contrasted sharply with the armed alertness of the guards who watched from lookout posts.

"Cubists," Ruth said. Her voice shook a little, and it came to Shannon with a shock that something about the singing men made her afraid as he had not seen her afraid even in the Keyne house. "They're content wherever they are, like cattle—and there are more of them every day, more than anyone realizes. We'll all be like that some day, Shannon, unless we get away from the Cubes."

They got out of the copter and turned to the alley mouth that led upward to the waterfront streets.

"We'll find a way to stop them," Shannon said. "And we won't have to give up Earth to do it."

IX

THEY went through the alley in darkness, conscious of each other only as heavier shadows in a confusion of shadows. Now and then a random wash of reflected light from searchbeams sweeping the bay glowed behind them, lighting

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their way palely until the concrete canyons of warehouse walls absorbed it. For the brief moment it lasted, they could see the broken pavement underfoot and avoid the stinking miscellany of garbage that littered it; when the glow was gone the darkness rushed back thicker than before, forcing Shannon to draw a hand along the cold face of the building to keep his way.

Once Ruth cried out sharply and stumbled against him. Shannon caught her and drew her with him against the wall, holding her quiet until the trembling had gone out of her body.

"Something on the ground," she said faintly. "I stepped on it and it—moved."

They waited, drawing shallow reluctant breaths, until the gray wash of harbor light touched the alley again. A shadow stirred from the pavement and lurched away into darkness; a dock worker, sodden and filthy, drunk or drugged or hurt, making his way aimlessly on hands and knees back toward the wharfage.

"If all men were like that," Shannon said, "I'd be willing to let the Cubes have us. But we're not. We'll grow up some day, and leave that sort of beastliness behind."

The girl made a small sound of disgust in the darkness.

"We're not growing up from that," she said. "We're sliding down toward it. . .there's no way of dragging a whole species up by the scruff of the neck with laws and restrictions. That's why the masses are turning to the Cubes, because the Change offers their only escape from this sort of thing. Our only hope of staying free of it is to take the best we can get and start over again out there among the stars, leaving the rest behind."

Shannon straightened, irritated by her conviction. "Utopia can wait. We came here to get a weapon, remember?"

They moved on through darkness. The farther end of the alley lightened slowly, and with the return of sight Ruth's assurance came back.

"To the right here," she said when their alley intersected a wider street. "Ansel's shop is only a little way from the docks, otherwise I'd never have dared come here to begin with."

Two blocks to the right brought them to a dingy pledge-shop that huddled, dimly lighted and deserted, beside a brawling casino. They went in hurriedly to avoid the drunken crowd that milled in and out of the pleasure house, and stood blinking in the musty silence of the shop until their eyes adjusted to the gloom.

Dusty glass cases ranked the floor and tiered the walls, displaying an improbable miscellany of pledged valuables: gold-handled knives, wrist chronos, kits of precision tools, wigs and ornaments, delicate silver jewelry and soft-glazed pottery looted from the ruins of Martian cities by rocket crews and pawned here for the price of a drink. Shannon was looking through the display, fascinated by its variety, when Ruth's hand on his arm brought him alert.

"Let me do the bargaining," she warned. To the man who came toward them from the back of the room she said, "You'll remember me, Ansel—my father and I bought a consignment of small arms from you a few weeks ago. We've taken on a new recruit since then, and need one dart-gun more."

ANSEL was a heavy man, middle-aged and a little bald, with a square sullen face and pale eyes that considered the girl with sly interest. "I wouldn't be likely to forget one like you."

He laughed soundlessly at his own subterranean wit and jerked his head toward the back of the shop. "Come with me. For a price I'll get you any kind of weapon you want."

They followed him through a surprisingly thick doorway into a smaller room full of light and smoke and the stale stink of alcohol. The place was empty except for a man and a woman who sat at a bare, round table, the man small and expensively dressed, his sharp face stamped with predatory intelligence, the woman young and hard with a practised,

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metallic brittleness. Both were intent upon their own private diversion, their laughter bursting harshly on the air like the discordant barking of dogs.

Upon the table between them the object of their amusement wavered unsteadily on tiny splayed feet, its ten-inch yellow body bloated already with the beginning of Terrestrial decay, a glass clutched in one three-fingered hand and a smoldering cigar butt in the other. Shannon recognized it instantly; a Titanian native, the only approximation to intelligent life men had found in the solar system and a species so close to extinction that exportation from the Saturnian system had become a penal offense.

It bobbed its acorn head at Shannon, its snouted face hideous with moronic exhiliration. "*More men,*" it gobbled. "*I am men too, see?*"

The woman laughed shrilly. The man poured whiskey into the creature's glass. "Then drink like men. Get drunk!"

It drank. It staggered on aimless feet, drooling and scorching itself with the cigar, its idiot ego wholly engrossed in its business of aping humanity.

Shannon felt Ruth Nugent's fingers digging into his arm, warning him. He shook her off and turned to see Ansel grinning at him, enjoying his reaction.

"It won't live a week," Shannon said. "Why don't you stop them?"

Ansel shrugged. "It's their pet."

He moved across the room to a desk that held an untidy heap of papers and a radophone unit. The radophone screen lighted at his touch; when Shannon came toward him Ansel raised a hand in signal to the man at the table.

"Hold him, Chiro," he said. "This is Shannon, the man Guild Headquarters listed for pickup. Conniston wants him."

The man at the table took a dart-gun from a jacket pocket and turned it on Shannon. Neither he nor the woman spoke. In the sudden silence Shannon heard the little Titanian stumbling drunkenly, jabbering memorized obscenities.

The calling code faded on the screen. Conniston's face replaced it, scowling, the inevitable cigar clamped in his mouth. The scowl froze at sight of Shannon.

"I don't want you any more, Shannon," Connistan said instantly. "I want Lucas. Where is he?"

Shannon shook his head. "I couldn't tell you if I wanted to. I don't know."

Conniston studied him warily, and even on the flat monochrome of the radophone screen the tension that drove the man was plain. The bloodshot weariness of the Guild leader's eyes told Shannon the answer—Conniston had not slept recently, which meant that he was facing an emergency too great for temporizing.

Conniston tried again.

"I made a mistake when I threw Lucas out," he said. "I need him, Shannon, so badly that I may lose this fight against the Cubes without him. *Where is he?*"

"I don't know," Shannon said.

Ansel took a step forward. "Let us handle him, Mr. Conniston. Chiro and I—"

Conniston silenced him with an impatient gesture. "Hold him there until I send for him. And be careful—he's not important nor intelligent, but he is dangerous."

BEHIND them the little Titanian giggled senselessly; there was a sudden scraping of chairs, and the woman screamed. Shannon turned to see her dabbing with her handkerchief at her coat, which the creature had just fouled. Chiro cursed shrilly and struck the Titanian with his gun, smashing it into a corner where it lay whimpering and retching.

Shannon went in instantly, too fast for Ansel's startled bellow to mend the break. Chiro's arm was thin and ridiculously frail in his grip; he picked the dart-gun from the man's hand and flung him after the Titanian, and turned back to Ansel with the same movement.

Ansel had a dart-gun half out of his jacket pocket, his pale eyes starting in his effort at haste. Shannon shot him be-

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fore the weapon was clear; the dull concussion of the explosion shook the room like the dropping of a heavy weight.

In his corner Chiro lay without moving. The woman backed against the wall, her face pallid under its cosmetic smear; Shannon considered her coldly, and the indecision in his eyes made her terror a strain too great to bear. She fainted, wilting downward in an angular, graceless huddle.

Shannon went toward her, ignoring Ruth Nugent's frozen cry: "Shannon—*Paul, please!*"

He stepped across the unconscious woman to the corner where the Titanian lay moaning with the agony of its broken back. Its discolored eyes looked up at him piteously.

"*Men,*" it croaked. "*See, I am men. . . .*"

"I wish to God I were not," Shannon said, and stopped its whimpering with the dart-gun.

Ruth's voice brought him back to the moment at hand. The radophone screen was blank; a rumble of voices from the street and the sound of the pledge-shop's door being thrown open told him that Conniston had used his time to good advantage.

"The back way," Ruth was saying. "There's an alley there, if they haven't blocked it already . . ."

They went out into a darkness loud with the clamor of men still pouring from the casino next door. This time they did not feel their way; they ran blindly into the night with a single thought between them—to get back to their copter on the docks.

The alley took them into another street, a wider way that led at right angles to the one on which the pledge-shop fronted. They followed it for a block at top speed before the sounds of pursuit reached them, and took another alley to the left when the glare of hand torches stabbed the night behind them.

They emerged from the alley upon the waterfront with the harbor smell heavy in the air, and at the end of the first block they picked out ther landing pier by the sound of Cubist voices from the ore barge, singing the same slow song.

The copter stood where they had left it, a deeper shadow in the lee of the warehouse. They crouched beside it, looking sharply for a trap, and Ruth Nugent spoke for the first time since leaving the pledge-shop.

"You'd have killed the other two if I hadn't stopped you," she said. The scorn in her voice cut like a whiplash. "Shannon, you're a beast."

He crouched in the darkness, panting, feeling her contempt piled upon his own futility like an intolerable last straw.

"I wouldn't," he said. "But I should have. They were no more human than the Titanian."

SHANNON put a hand to the warehouse wall, bracing himself against the reaction that swept him suddenly in a growing wave of nausea. The girl stood quietly, an aloof shadow in the darkness, her silence accusing him.

"Stand back," he said thickly, giving up the struggle. "I'm going—to be—sick."

There was a cataclysmic moment of giddiness when he stumbled and did not try to stop his falling because it made no difference whether he stood or fell, or got up again.

The world steadied again to the improbable realization that Ruth Nugent's arms held him strongly, lifting him up from the cold pavement. Her breath was coming in short suppressed sobs; holding him so, the perfume she had used on her hair came to him faintly, a fragrance heady and unfamiliar, and the weight of her breasts pressed firm and heavy against his face.

"I'm sorry, Paul," she said. "I didn't know—oh, it doesn't matter! Can you stand now?"

He stirred, gaining strength from her strength. He even laughed a little without knowing why. "It seems I was wrong," he said. "I do need help, after all."

In the helicopter it was Ruth who

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took the controls. Shannon slumped in the seat, surrendering to a lassitude that drained him of all purpose. There was no need to push himself further. . . .

The reason for his weakness struck him so forcibly that he laughed outright.

"I've been too busy to eat," he said. "The last meal I had was in Colorado, the night I came back from Io. I'm starved."

He felt the startled turn of her head toward him. "Colorado? But the visicasts said you landed outside Boston Metro!"

"Nothing you hear is true in this nightmare," Shannon said. He found a cigarette and lighted it, passed it on to Ruth and tapped another for himself. "You've been involved in it long enough to know that. It's a darker and more complex thing than anyone realizes. . . Gil Lucas thinks that the motive force behind the Cubes is too big and too alien in concept for us to grasp. Gil has an idea about it, but he won't talk—it's a thing so wild, he says, that even a teleshow horror program wouldn't touch it. I'm beginning to agree with him."

She pressed her question, refusing to be diverted. "We've given up trying to understand the Cubes, on the *Ark*. But what have they to do with your landing in Colorado instead of in Massachusetts?"

He watched a city-glow slide past them on the horizon, and considered how he should answer her while he fished about with the copter's communicator for the city's identity. The microwave beam from an unseen stratoport came in strongly, its mechanical voice placing their location with monotonous precision: "Albany, New York. Weather fair, visibility unlimited to Syracuse, Scranton, Reading. . .low-ceiling ran past Rochester, Pittsburgh, Washington. The time is 2319. Albany, New York. . . ."

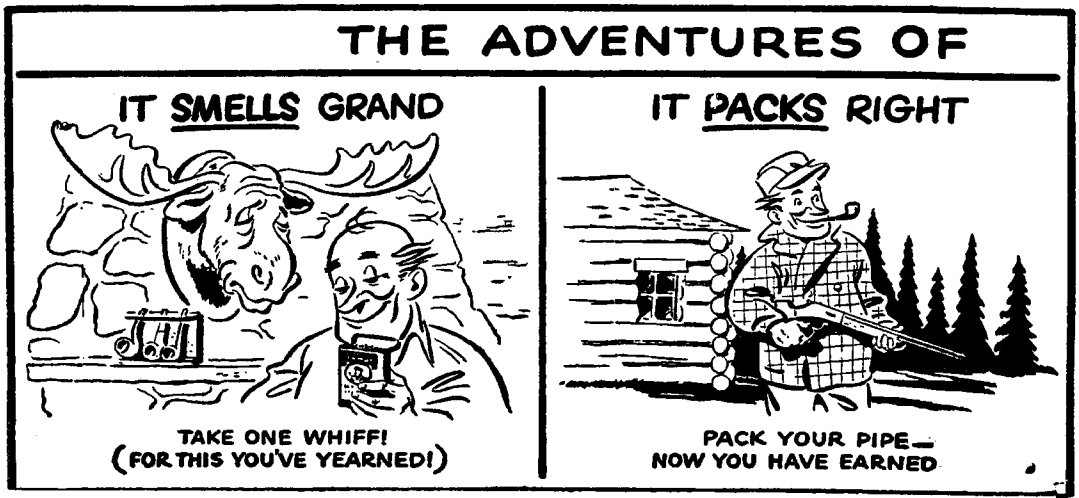
He shut off the robot voice and told Ruth Nugent everything that had happened to him from the moment he left Io. The relief he felt in sharing his uncertainty was, oddly, as satisfying as it was unexpected.

X

THEY were passing Youngstown to the south and were well into the rain the Albany microbeam had promised by the time he had finished. Ruth had given the copter controls over to the auto-pilot and sat half facing Shannon, her eyes wide and dark in the faint wash of light from the instrument panel.

"But it's so confusing," she said. "And so *pointless*. And yet—"

"Yet there's a pattern behind it," Shannon said. He yawned drowsily, lulled by the drone of rain against the copter's hull. "A sort of alien blueprint



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that makes no sense to us because it wasn't conceived by our kind of intelligence. And whatever it is that shaped that plan is very, very sure of itself . . . sometimes I'm tempted to believe that Conniston is right, that the only way to fight the Cubes is to bomb them out of their Sanctuaries without considering the lives lost. Then, when I think of the greed and the rottenness in our high places and of filthy degenerates like Ansel dragging the rest of humanity down with them, I wonder if the Cubes aren't right. And then I remember Ellen and I know the whole thing is wrong, that something must be done. I don't pretend to know what—I can't think just now past finding Ellen and getting her out of Conniston's reach, if he hasn't got to her already."

The abrupt coolness of Ruth's voice might have warned a man more acute than Shannon. "I'll be as happy as you to get this over with. I'm anxious to get back to the *Ark* and Father—and to Alec."

The sudden return of stiffness between them left Shannon obscurely irritated.

"You should have stayed with him," he said. "Neither of us would be here now if you and your father had stuck to your own affairs and let mine alone."

In the silence that followed, an ironic possibility passed through his mind; he voiced it, baiting her with deliberate malice.

"Your father wanted me on the *Ark* badly enough to offer me charge of the colonization project over Alec's head. Has it occurred to you that he might need me enough to strike almost any sort of bargain with me?"

She stared at him, puzzled. "I don't know what you mean."

"If I joined his staff I'd be starting out alone again. And two years of living alone on Io convinced me that I wasn't meant to be a bachelor."

"My father considered that when he chose the *Ark's* crew," she said. "Three fourths of the personnel are women—you could find a wife or companion easily enough. That's the purpose of a colonizing party, to populate new worlds."

He laughed at the color that rushed to her face when she understood belatedly what he was driving at.

"But suppose I held out for the privilege of choosing my own harem, and picked you to head it? Would your urge to preserve humanity balk at that?"

"I wouldn't do it," she said scornfully. "I'd stay behind on Earth first!"

Shannon chuckled and settled himself deeper into his corner. "You won't have to do that. You can go ahead out to 61 Cygni, with or without Alec. *I'm* staying on Earth."

[*Turn page*]

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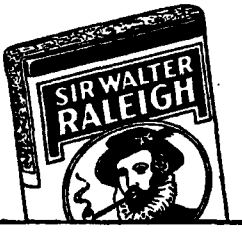

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She turned her face to watch the rain-streaks that patterned the port glass, ignoring him. Shannon, still chuckling, fell asleep.

HE AWOKE to an uneasy knowledge that the copter was no longer in flight and that he was alone. The rain had stopped, and silence pressed in upon him like a physical weight.

He climbed stiffly out of the machine, feeling for the dart-gun in his pocket, and found himself standing ankle-deep in wet grass. The sky was still dark except for a fat white moon silvering the tops of a cloudbank lying low on the western horizon and for a lesser glow that lay to the north. The smaller glow was very close; when his eyes had adjusted, he estimated that the building or buildings from which it came lay less than a hundred yards away through the trees.

He was moving toward the light, holding the dart-gun ready because he did not know where he was nor why, when Ruth Nugent came out of the darkness.

"I thought you had deserted me," he said. He put away his weapon, his uneasiness giving way to quick relief. "Where are we?"

"Between Fremont and Sandusky Bar, near Ohio Peace Center," she said. "Don't show a light—the Center is surrounded by Government troops. They may have patrols out."

In the copter again, she placed a paper-wrapped package on the seat between them. "There's a sort of roadhouse for surface travelers back there on the highway. I thought we'd better eat before we go on to Peace Center."

He did not touch the package. "You went up there alone in the dark, knowing that you might be picked up? You must have been pretty hungry!"

"As a matter of fact, I'm not." She set about unwrapping sandwiches, opening a steaming plastobottle of coffee. "I had dinner with Alec before Father sent me to the Keyne house. A very good dinner, the sort I'm not likely to have again soon."

Her calmness irritated him; that he should benefit from the risk she had run made him still angrier.

"Then you brought this for me . . . returning good for evil, is that it? Well—"

He broke off, recalling the weakness that had struck him down on the Metro docks and the strength she had lent him to go on. She could have taken the copter then and left him, as she could have left him now. Instantly contrite, he put out a hand toward her involuntarily.

"I'm sorry. You've been more than considerate about everything, and I—"

"It doesn't matter," she said. She took the hand he held out, as if the two of them were sealing a truce. "We've both been under a strain, you more than I."

The words meant nothing, but the unexpected contact disturbed him inordinately. He felt again, as he had sensed it like a revelation when she helped him into the copter on the Metro dock, the soft strength and the warmth of her, and a sudden confusion of purpose seized him.

"You'd better get at the sandwiches," she said. And, disconcertingly: "If you'll let go my hand, I think I'd like one myself after all."

IN THE first gray of dawn they took the copter up again, and found at once that they were nearer Peace Center than they had thought. In the dark open country below them sprawled a wide crescent of lights, its twinkling cusps lying upon the southern horizon; when they drew nearer, the crescent extended itself to a semi-circle and then to a full ring that enclosed the shadowy Center.

"The post lights of Government troops," Ruth said. "They've been in bivouac here for days, expecting trouble."

The size of the installation with its close-ranked barracks and stratofighter fields dismayed Shannon. He had expected a token guard, a minimum cordon thrown up to satisfy the public that Government was meeting its obligations. But this—

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"They must be expecting trouble in earnest," Shannon said. "There's all of a full regiment down there, with stratofighters!"

"Solar Services has a long arm," Ruth said. "They've forced Government to put every Peace Center in the world under such a guard. They've too much at stake in the Cubist movement now to let the Guild break it up."

The Center rose out of the early fog and the darkness, disturbing Shannon further by its extent. He had not expected it to be small, accommodating as it did the influx of Cubist neophytes from all states east of the Mississippi, but the actual size of the place was startling.

A soft glow of street lighting inside the city outlined the arrangement of it, a concentric series of broad curving streets lapping outward and intersecting die-straight avenues that converged inward to a central building like spokes to a hub. Shannon, estimating the capacity of the Center with an engineer's eye, assessed the probable population at two hundred thousand.

"They're stronger than I guessed," he said. "No wonder Conniston was frantic—with two Centers like this in the States and at least one in every other major country over the globe, it's only a matter of time until the Guilds are completely drained."

The dawn brightened with a burst of red sunlight that touched the taller buildings of the Center, glinting on glass and metal and polished stone to set up black angular shadows that threw the underlying architectural pattern of the city into exaggerated relief. A sense of familiarity grew upon Shannon, and his instant recognition of it roused an uneasy premonition that made the short hair prickle on his neck.

He had seen that same inconsonant motif in his dream, its odd archetonic stylization peering through stone and metal like the outlandish tracery of an alien skeleton.

His disquiet mounted when his eyes followed the inevitable convergence of avenues to the central structure at the city's heart and found it a key to the whole. . . .

A gigantic Cube!

WHEN they had passed over the encircling bivouac area and were slanting down toward the city the first sign of life appeared—another copter, dropping toward them out of the sunrise. It was not a military machine; Shannon, alert for the unexpected, guessed at once that its pilot had been waiting through the night outside the cordon to come into the Center under cover of the rising sun.

"Wait," he said when Ruth touched the controls to swing their copter off course. "That's no military plane. We'll have a look before we run."

It dipped beside them, its fog-wet port sliding back. Gil Lucas looked out at them, his round face taut and strained. His sparse, neutral hair was more disordered than ever; sunlight glinted redly on his thick glasses. His voice came thinly, urgently.

Shannon pushed back his own port, straining his ears to hear above the whirring of copter blades. The thin shouting came louder, but still broken by distance and the rush of air: *"Paul . . . trap . . . turn back. . . ."*

Shannon slammed the port and took the controls from Ruth, swung the copter about to follow Gil's speeding machine.

They were too late. Pursuit ships rose from the fields below like swift flights of birds, circling to hem in both copters. From them two sleek egg-shaped interceptor missiles darted out, jockeyed briefly on robot jets and came down in sharp, warning thrusts.

The ultimatum was too plain to miss. "We'll have to go down," Shannon said.

He dropped the copter sharply, conscious of Gil's machine keeping pace with his fall. Beside him Ruth sat quietly, her eyes on Shannon's face with an odd blending of fear and pity. When the copter touched earth she put a hesitant hand on Shannon's arm.

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"Be careful," she begged. "Please, Paul!"

Shannon stepped out without answering. The other copter settled beside him, and Gil Lucas got out.

"Throw your gun back into the copter," Gil said. The command in his voice sounded at odd variance with his mild round face and scholar's stoop. "You can't fight this, Paul. Do you want Miss Nugent killed, too?"

"No, I don't want that," Shannon said, and found himself in a sudden cold terror at the sense of loss the thought evoked. He tossed the dart-gun behind him into the copter and looked at Ruth. "I'm sorry I brought you into this. I should have known I couldn't bull my way through a thing as big as this."

She smiled at him fully for the first time, and the fright went out of her eyes.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "We haven't lost yet, Paul. We'll find a way out somehow."

OVERHEAD the robot missiles darted back to their parent ships, the stratofighters wheeled in formation and returned to their fields. Armed men came running from the bivouac, blue-uniformed legs twinkling in the early sunlight. . . .

Their cell was like the rest of the camp, without comfort but serving efficiently the function for which it was designed. Two bunks, two chairs and a table made up the furniture, all bolted securely to the floor. The walls were of flinty pressed-plastic, broken by a barred window at one end of the room and a barred door at the other. An armed guard watched from the hallway beyond the door, his eyes frankly curious.

"They won't keep us here for long," Gil Lucas said, "else they'd have separated us. I think we'll be taken before the officer in charge of the post before anything definite happens."

Shannon lit a cigarette and went to the window, to stand frowning out over a monotonous sweep of drill fields. In the distance, the glass and stone of Peace Center buildings gleamed under the sun.

"Government will have charges enough to hold us as long as they choose," he said. "Solar—and Conniston, too—will know about our arrest by now, and they'll throw their weight against us. We haven't a chance to clear ourselves, legally."

"You made it easy for them," Gil said. He took off his glasses and polished them absently with a handkerchief. "The civil police have you on list for complicity in Myra Keyne's death, for the killing of that pledge-shop owner and for possession of an unauthorized weapon."

He grinned wryly when Shannon turned on him. "Oh, I'm in the same boat, Paul. Government has a pickup order out for me as a subversive operating against the Cubes in defiance of official order. Conniston hired me and my research team, but that's beside the point—Conniston swings weight enough to shrug off the charge. I don't."

"I'm sorry about your being pulled into this, Gil," Shannon said. "How did you know we'd come here this morning?"

"I expected you last night," Gil said. "When you left my laboratory you didn't take time to clear the Keyne calling code off the radophone, and that told me where you'd gone. Then the visicasts reported Myra Keyne's death and quoted neighbors as saying that Ellen had been sent to Ohio Peace Center. I knew you'd go after her, not knowing how impossible it would be to slip through the military cordon Government has set up here. I came out last night to warn you and turn you back, but missed you when you went to that waterfront pledge-shop first."

Shannon turned wearily back to his window. "I suppose I should have known better, but I wasn't in the mood then for logical thinking. I took it for granted that Conniston would send men after Ellen, and I had to reach her first if I could."

"He doesn't want Ellen now," Gil said. "She's of no value to him now—he wants me back instead. Conniston knows now what he should have understood months

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ago, that he's losing the fight. But he's too stubborn to give up, and he can't lose anything more by making an all-out last stand. He'll use force now, Paul. All the force he can muster, which is plenty."

XI

SHANNON, looking out across the drill fields toward Peace Center, saw movement there for the first time—a growing queue of Cubists entering the city, a lengthening gray column that stretched back to the encircling bivouac and beyond.

He followed the column to its source and saw a spreading blot of machines outside the military cordon, surface cars and copters and private planes that settled and disgorged gray figures by the hundred to join the stream.

"Something big is going on out there," Shannon said. Excitement rose in him, supplanting concern. "Cubists are coming into the Center by hundreds—look, there's an intercity shuttle, loaded to the roof. And stragglers on foot, coming from everywhere across the fields. . . ."

Gil came to the window beside him, standing on tiptoe to peer through the bars.

"I think this is the beginning of the end," he said. "Conniston is launching that last-ditch offensive of his, and the Cubists are gathering at their Peace Centers to put themselves under Government protection. They wouldn't try to evade individual persecution, but this is a basic threat to their existence. There's going to be trouble such as you never dreamed of, Paul—mankind has survived a million plagues and three atomic wars, but it won't survive this. Only the Cubists will be left."

Shannon stared at him, shaken by his friend's certainty.

"Everybody will fight except the Cubists," Gil said. "The Guild will try to destroy the Cubes, Peace Centers, Sanctuaries and all. Solar Services and the other syndicates will try to stop them. Government will throw its weight into the fight. There won't be any neutrals in this; everybody will be involved."

Ruth came to stand between them, watching the patient gray tide entering the city. "But they're so gentle and deliberate, so *calm* about it all! It doesn't seem possible that they should win, Gil."

"Divide and conquer," Gil said. "The rank and file of humanity never want to fight. They don't like dying. When the confusion grows bad enough, with every man against his neighbor, they'll turn Cubists to get out of it. It's a perfect solution to the little people's problem, with Peace Centers already set up to shelter them, don't you see? And when the dust clears away, there'll be nothing left but Cubists."

Shannon felt Ruth's hand on his arm and looked down to meet her troubled eyes. They turned to Gil uncertainly, disturbed by the picture he laid before them.

"How can you be so sure?" Shannon asked. "How do you know all this, Gil?"

"You'll understand it too, in due time," Gil said. "But for now—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of a four-man guard detail, headed by a blond young captain with a clipped mustache and an air of icy efficiency.

"Colonel Tichnor will see you for disposition now," the captain said curtly. "Come with me."

THEY went to post headquarters through an orderly confusion of military activity. Work details passed them, laden with tools; turbotractors whined by, dragging loaded caissons. On the drill fields soldiers marched and swung and pivoted, their blue uniforms gleaming through the dust of their marching.

To Shannon the scene was suddenly as unreal as a dream, without depth or meaning. The men moved like puppets, purposeless as the machines they handled, showing nowhere a suggestion of understanding nor a hint of awareness of their own destinies. He saw in a brief flash of unsuspected insight the disorganization that existed among mankind, as it had always existed, the ultimate confusion that barred each man from his

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neighbor and shattered his society into a perpetual chaos of personal isolations and petty futilities. *I couldn't be farther from them*, Shannon thought, *if I were still on Io.*

Across the drill fields the slow gray flood of Cubists presented the perfect antithesis to human confusion; in its tide he sensed a deliberate harmony that could exist forever, without uncertainty and without belligerence.

And he hated it.

He despised their regimented Cubist serenity with a sudden sick loathing that made him turn his head from Peace Center and accept with relief the cold severity of the headquarters building into which the mustached young captain led them. Shannon felt Ruth's shoulder pressing against his when they entered, and sensed that she was desperately afraid of what was about to happen. He sympathized with her fear without sharing it; his own depression, paradoxically, denied anxiety.

The colonel waited for them behind a desert expanse of bare, functional desk, a squat gray man with cold intolerant eyes in a fat-creased face, his body gross and heavy in its overtailored blue uniform. Years of command had given him a dignity and an arrogant presence that reflected itself in the frozen respect of his subordinates; but to Shannon's dreary perception he was only another insignificant atom of deluded ego, impotently stranded on the islet of its own identity.

A civilian rose from a chair beside the colonel's desk. It did not surprise Shannon to see that it was Clayton, the Solar Services personnel manager who had paid and discharged him in Boston Metro.

"These are the three," Clayton said. "You'll find Solar Services ready to prove its gratitude for your cooperation, Colonel. Will you provide a suitable escort to return the girl to Boston Metro?"

The colonel drummed fat fingers on his desk, austerely pleased with himself. "And what about the other two?"

Clayton shrugged. "We need the girl to negotiate an understanding with her father. The others are of no consequence, so long as we are rid of them."

He looked at Shannon for the first time, vindictively. "You should have stuck with Solar, Shannon. There's little profit in fighting us."

"Don't worry about their giving you further trouble," the colonel said. "I see no need of putting Government to the expense of bringing them to trial."

He raised a finger toward his blond guard captain. "Arrange for an escort to take the girl to Boston Metro. Execute these two."

The captain snapped to attention. "Detail—"

"Wait," someone said from the doorway. "It's too late for that, Clayton. The plan has changed."

SEEING the two of them standing shoulder to shoulder in the doorway was, to Shannon, like a completion of the cycle of unreality that had begun three endless days ago. They were the same two that had put him on the stratoplane in Denver, and who had promised that in due time he would know everything.

They ignored him now as if he did not exist.

"The plan has changed," one of them said again. "We are here to take charge of the prisoners—by personal order of President Orsham."

The colonel looked questioningly at Clayton. Clayton scowled uncertainly.

"I remember you as members of Orsham's staff," he said. "But I don't know about this . . . you've a written order to support your claim?"

"There was no time for a written order," the man said. "There is no time now for argument. Please don't delay us."

Suspicion flared in Clayton's eyes. "I don't believe it. Colonel, will you order your guard to hold these men until I radophone Solar Services? I think they're—"

"You think we're agents from Connis-

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ton's Guild," the man said. "But we are not armed. Has it occurred to you that we may be Servants of the Cubes?"

They stared, confused by the concept of militant pacifism which he advanced. To Shannon came a panoramic vision of gray Cubists streaming across the world toward their Peace Centers and Sanctuaries, each individual as like his neighbor as termites in a hive. The analogy disturbed him by its inference; even among termites with their generic unity of volition there are specialized classes designed and trained for their particular purposes—and the same condition might apply also to the Cubists. Until now he had seen only the placid and amiable among them; but who directed them, and how did the directors look? Like ordinary men, able to mingle unsuspected with those who had been their neighbors? Like these two men in the doorway?

"Arrest them," Clayton said. "They can't be Cubists—they haven't the look. They're Guild spies."

The blond captain touched the sidearm at his belt and looked toward his colonel for confirmation. Behind him his guard detail shifted warily, ready to act.

"Wait," the colonel said.

He frowned speculatively, and Shannon, watching the play of thought across his arrogant face, read clearly the weighing of probabilities that went on in the other's mind. Solar Services had promised the colonel payment—money, promotion, a sinecure outside the military—to turn over the fugitives to it, and he had no mind now to risk his reward. If those latecomers represented a last-minute change in Orsham's plans—

"A radophone call is soon made," the colonel said. "There is a unit in the cabinet behind you, Mr. Clayton."

"No," the two men in the doorway said together. They moved apart to let a third man come between them into the room.

A fat man with sparse gray hair carefully brushed and small pale eyes that considered the room with impersonal deliberation. In his hands he carried a little black box that held the answer to everything. . . .

A LITTLE black box that turned Shannon back to the sweating fantasy of his dream, bringing back with it a chill of terror too great for the waking mind to grasp. He moved backward instinctively, taking Ruth with him, his eyes following the fat man with narrow fascination.

The colonel stood up behind his desk, his gray face startled. The blond captain fidgeted uneasily; the four guards moved closer together, like children touching each other for reassurance in the dark. Clayton gaped palely.

"You're no Solar operative," Clayton said. "Nor a Guild agent, either. Who are you?"

"A Bearer," the fat man said, and raised the box in his hands like one beginning a ritual. "With a Cube."

To Shannon and Ruth he said: "Turn your backs."

When they turned he opened the box.

The Cube floated between his parted hands, a coruscant block of soft green light that warmed the room to its deepest corner, radiating a sense of peace that was like the aura Shannon had felt at the doors of Metro Sanctuary, but subtly different and infinitely stronger.

There was a silence like death.

To Shannon it seemed that he drifted on a warm euphoric wind toward a place of indescribable content, a place of peace as desirable as a lake in a green valley to a man parched by desert heat. He was only faintly conscious of Ruth beside him; her hand in his was like a touch of air; a contact singularly pleasant because it meant that she was going with him toward that drowsy paradise. . . .

They never reached it. Sight returned first, and sound followed; the distant clank of tanks and caissons, the far soft rhythm of marching men. Somewhere outside a bird sang, full-throated and blithe. Shannon shook himself and

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turned at the sound of footsteps leaving the room.

The colonel still stood behind his desk, but the grossness had gone out of him and the arrogance in his eyes had given way to a serenity that radiated from him like a tangible extension of his being. The captain and his guard detail stood tranquilly with Clayton, none of them similar in face or in build but all as alike as wax dolls poured from the same smiling mold.

Cubists.

The fat man had gone, and with him one of the two who accompanied him. The other waited briefly to speak to Shannon.

"We didn't lie to you in Denver," he said. "When the time is right you'll know. Everything."

Shannon would have followed, but Gil Lucas caught his arm. "He's right, Paul. You'll have to wait."

AFTERWARD, escape was so easy that it was hard to believe they had ever been in danger.

The colonel went with them personally to their copter and stood smiling while they entered it. The blond captain and his guard waited placidly with him, their weapons discarded and no faintest trace of military stiffness left in them.

With one foot on the copter step Shannon hesitated and looked back at the shining pile of Peace Center. Gray-clad Cubists thronged the streets, tiny in the distance, moving steadily toward the center of the city; the haze of dust from marching men on the drill fields obscured lesser details, but for a moment it seemed to Shannon that he could make out every smiling face in the flowing crowds. He recalled his dream, and felt the same prickly touch of terror at the thought that the throng moved in a set pattern whose meaning was only half hidden from him, and that if the dust of marching men should settle he would see each face familiar to him, tiny but microscopically clear. . . .

"I came here to find a girl named Ellen Keyne, my fiancée," he said. "She was transferred to Peace Center yesterday from Boston Suburban. Would it be possible to find her—in that?"

The colonel shook his head. "I'm afraid not. Peace Centers keep no individual records, and in a press so great it would be impossible to find a particular person. And there will be more here—by this same time tomorrow there will be millions."

"I was afraid of that," Shannon said.

Still it took him a long moment to grasp the finality of it. *Ellen is there,* he thought, *moving with the rest toward the big Cube at the center of the city. And I'm leaving her there, giving her up. I've failed, after coming so close. . . .*

He got into the copter and sat blindly while Gil Lucas lifted the machine and turned it eastward. Ruth put a hesitant hand on Shannon's arm and he shook it off with unconscious roughness, unaware of her or of her concern.

The strained silence of the copter cabin aroused him finally. He came out of his passive absorption to find Ruth crying softly, without sound.

"What is it?" he demanded. "What's the matter?"

When she did not answer he put a hand under her chin and tilted her face so that he could see. Her eyes, dark and enormous, glistened with tears; her mouth quivered, attempting defiance and failing.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's stupid of me, I know, but all at once I couldn't bear seeing you beaten. After all this—"

Shannon stared at her in amazement. "Beaten? My God, you're sorry for *me?*"

He drew back, astonished and oddly humbled before her. He groped for words and found none, stopped in awkward silence.

"It's certainly not your fault," he said finally. "I'd have lost long ago, but for you."

XII

HE SAT considering the confusion

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they had left and the greater chaos in the making, and found a negative reassurance in the fact that they were alive and free.

"Perhaps I'm not beaten yet," he said. "Maybe Conniston's offensive won't come. Maybe it will be beaten down if it does, and we—I can go on from there."

Gil gave Ruth his handkerchief and looked at Shannon in exasperation. "Paul, you fool, shut up. Let her alone, will you?"

Shannon met his look thoughtfully. "All right, we'll talk about something else. A little truth from you, while we're on the subject, might explain some of the mumbo-jumbo I've been tangled in since the moment I came back to Earth."

He considered the list of discrepancies that plagued him, and settled on the most immediate. "It occurs to me that you know a great deal more than you've admitted, Gil. That affair in the colonel's office, for instance—why did the Cube have no effect on us, when it sent the others through the Change against their will? Why did the fat man with the Cube warn us to turn our backs?"

Gil shrugged helplessly. "Because you didn't fit the pattern required by the Cubes. Remember what the Servant told you at the Metro Sanctuary? That you are one of the wild ones, and not acceptable? Someone has gone to a staggering amount of trouble to guide your movements, Paul. Has it occurred to you that they may have the best of reasons, that you may be slated to play a part in this important enough to justify their pains?"

His first talk with Gil in Conniston's apartment came back to Shannon, and with it a share of his old helplessness.

"You said once that you had guessed what was behind the Cubes, but that the idea was so wild even a telemovie fantasy wouldn't touch it. You know definitely what it is now?"

Gil nodded, his round face sober.

"It's a tremendous thing, Paul. A bigger thing than I suspected, and so fantastically simple that you'd never believe it unless I showed you proof. I can't do that now. I've got to get us under cover first."

"We're going into hiding?" Ruth asked. "Why?"

"Either Solar Services or Conniston's Guild would be glad to turn you over to Government police, even at a time like this, or to dispose of you themselves. Solar is as determined as Conniston to see this fight through, and just now they have the advantage. They're overlooking nothing. They're still trying to trace the *Ark*, even, and break up Dace Nugent's stellar project."

Mention of her father brought Ruth back to her own predicament. "I'd almost forgotten! Father will be trying to find me, and they may be able to trace him through the friends he turns to for help. I've got to get out to—"

Shannon cut her off sharply, warningly. "Keep quiet—do you want to give the *Ark* away? Doesn't it mean anything to you that the Bearer warned us in the colonel's office to turn our backs before he opened his box, *but didn't see fit to warn Gil?*"

She put a hand to her mouth and looked at Gil in horror. He gave her his wry, crooked grin, and she shrank back against Shannon, trembling.

"You think I'm a Cubist agent, like the fat man with the box," Gil said. "I don't blame you for being suspicious—how can you be sure what I am? How do you know, Paul, that Ruth here isn't a Cubist too?"

"I don't," Shannon said.

He heard Ruth's gasp and felt her draw away from him, and voiced another possibility as disquieting, laying his corrosive uncertainty in the open.

"How can I tell what she is? I may even be a Cubist myself, without knowing it."

THERE was a silence while they sat and stared at one another in uneasy speculation. "There you have it," Gil said presently. "None of us knows whether the others are Normals or Cub-

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ists, and there's no way of finding out now. We'll get nowhere accusing each other—why don't we shelve the whole thing until we're safe again in my Metro headquarters?"

"I'd like to forget it," Shannon said. "We've been friends a long time, so long that it's hard to remember when we weren't. But I'm still waiting to hear the truth behind this thing, Gil."

"You won't wait until we reach Metro? You won't trust me even that long?"

Ruth spoke before Shannon found words. "If there's a Cubist among us, it shouldn't be hard to point him out."

She was still pale, but the shock had gone out of her eyes. When they turned toward her she tilted her head defiantly.

"How?" Gil asked.

"By elimination," she said. "I *know* I'm no Cubist, and I know Shannon isn't, because Cubists don't kill. Not even the Bearers, apparently."

Gil shrugged his round shoulders. "The best defense is a good offense. Or is this an example of feminine logic?"

He looked soberly at Shannon. "I can match that touching trust of Ruth's, I think. Does this make you feel safer?"

He put a hand under his jacket and brought out the dart-gun Shannon had tossed back into the copter at Peace Center post. "You're in control again. Now relax, will you?"

Shannon weighed the weapon thoughtfully in his hand. "I should be properly shamed, I suppose," he said. "But I'm not. I'm still waiting."

Gil made a helpless sound and slanted the copter downward. A small river rose to meet them, placid water gleaming like a dappled silver band between winding rows of trees that screened it against the late afternoon sunlight.

"It's not a thing to be explained on the run," he said. "We're going to need our wits to get away at all. We're still fugitives, you know."

He grinned wryly when they looked at him in surprise.

"You didn't expect to walk out of a government post so easily, did you? The fact that the officer-in-charge released us doesn't change our status—the colonel and Clayton and the others are probably in Peace Center with the other Cubists by now, and another officer will be in command. He'll want to know what happened to us, and it won't take long to find out."

He touched the proximity-indicator scope used for night flying, and for the first time Shannon saw that it was in operation, its luminous green dial glowing palely in the sunlit brightness of the cabin. A tiny pip gleamed at its western edge, moving swiftly across its gridded disk toward the central nub that marked the copter's position.

"A stratofighter scout," Gil said. "They're searching for us already. We'll have to get down out of reach of their detectors."

He set the copter down on a bank of the river between sheltering trees and cut the turbomotors. The breeze that came in when he opened the port had the cool fresh feel of approaching evening, a smell of running water and of green growing things.

"The Cubes," Shannon said. "Get to it, Gil. There's no knowing what may happen before we get back to Metro, and I've got to know about this. There's still Ellen, remember?"

"I tell you it can't be explained offhand," Gil said stubbornly. "Consider this—do either of you know anything about the human subconscious? How it manages our basic reactions independently of the conscious ego, or how it maintains systemic cell balance by hormone action?"

The abrupt change of tack left them floundering, at a loss.

"No one really understands that," Shannon said. "It's passed over for lack of facts, like the old mystery of collective intelligence among termites, labeled as reflexive or instinctive for want of better terms. But I'm not interested in biology, Gil. I want the truth about the Cubes."

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GIL shrugged wearily. "I warned you it wouldn't be simple. If you'll remember, I wouldn't discuss my guesswork about the Cubes that night in Conniston's apartment because the concept involved is not one easily accepted. It's not that the reasoning is obscure, but because the idea itself is too fantastic for belief on one hand and too damaging to the ego on another."

He checked the proximity scope, searching for the speeding little pip of the Government plane, and found it gone.

"It'll come back," he said. "Or another one will. We'd better wait."

They sat in uncomfortable silence, chafing under the strain of mutual distrust, until the stratofighter reappeared on the scope. The sun had gone down behind the trees by the time the racing pip left the screen again, and the cool gloom of evening moved across the river and hid the glint of running water from them.

Gil lifted the copter, lightless, and turned it toward the northeast.

"We're not far from Cleveland," he said. "We'll be safer above the lakes, where we can keep low without risking our necks over uneven terrain."

"I wonder if we'll be safer in Boston Metro than here," Ruth said. She looked at Gil in the gloom of the copter cabin, her eyes dark again with disquiet. "Paul, if it turns out that he *is* a Cubist, after all—"

Shannon cut her off impatiently. "The Cubists don't want us, or they'd never have let us go. They want something from us, yes, else they wouldn't have gone to the trouble of getting us out of that Government post back there at Peace Center—but we've nothing to fear from them at the moment. We'll have less when I learn what I want to know."

"You'll learn when we're back in Metro and I've time to go into it properly," Gil said. "But I'll tell you this much now: you're right about having nothing to fear from the Cubes themselves. They're only insentient instruments."

After that he dropped the copter low over Lake Erie, ignoring Shannon's angry insistence, and drove through the growing darkness so close above the water that they could hear the soft wash of waves through the whine of turbomotors and the swish of blades overhead. They got nothing further from him; he balked all argument by the simple expedient of refusing to answer.

Shannon gave it up finally and relapsed into sullen silence, pondering the little he had learned. After a time he felt Ruth relax gently against him, and was surprised to find that she had fallen asleep.

They skirted the sky-glow of Rochester and dropped again to skim across Lake Ontario, and with the resumption of their montonous passage over water drowsiness overtook Shannon as well.

At one moment he was listening vaguely to the interminable hiss of copter blades and the soft splashing of water below; at the next, shaken from sleep by an abrupt change in the copter's course, he was flashing low above the lighted expanse of a city.

Gil turned a dim face toward him in the darkness. "We'll be in my lab in a few minutes more, if I can shake off the police craft that just picked us up."

ALTHOUGH the two pursuing craft were not close, they hung on doggedly, searchbeams stabbing the darkness in a frantic effort to pick out their quarry in the crush of swift aerial traffic. Shannon, watching them, knew how the proximity scopes of the patrol copters must look—spotted and streaked by the flashing tracks of legitimate craft until the task of following a single unlighted machine through the confusion was like pursuing a particular bee through an angry swarm.

"They were waiting for us," Gil said. "Probably every city of any size in the country has been alerted, since we're fugitives from Government. They chal-

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lenged us at Metro limits, and I can't seem to shake them."

"You're tacking too sharply," Shannon said. "We're in a fast through-lane, and an erratic course gives us away. I think they'll lose us if you straighten out our flight-line."

A suburban shuttle overtook them on the right, lighted windows checkering its sleek cylindrical length. Gil opened the copter to full throttle and drew alongside it, ignoring its warning flurry of red proximity lamps. On the scopes of the pursuing patrol craft the two moving pips would have merged into one by their nearness; in the press of traffic about them it would be impossible to determine whether the fugitive pip detached itself from its larger host or continued with it.

"There's the lab area," Gil said. "I'm going to try for it. See if they spot us, Paul."

They dropped steeply into the canyoned labyrinth of dark warehouses. Shannon, craning his neck to look upward, saw the police ships flash past overhead, still pursuing the speeding shuttle.

"We're clear," he said. "Unless they overtake the shuttle and backtrack to search for us."

The jolt of landing awoke Ruth. She sat up, yawning sleepily, and stifled the yawn with a gasp when she caught the familiar city-glow rising about them against the sky.

"Boston Metro!" she said. "We're back already?"

"It's 0400," Gil said. "You've been asleep." To Shannon he said, "They'll have to throw up a screening cordon and search the whole area to find us now. And I think they're going to be too busy soon for that."

They got out of the copter and rolled it under its concealing shed and went down through the roof trap into the building. Gil led the way down the dark stairway; Shannon followed closely, with Ruth holding a light hand on his shoulder to keep her footing.

The great central shaft of the workroom was lighted dimly by a single floodlamp, empty except for the coppery shapes of the two bullet-nosed ships that had been built to use Nugent's light-drive. One of these still lay in its scaffolding, electric cables trailing from its interior; the other stood erect and ready, its rounded nose aimed at the flimsy sheet metal roof overhead. There was no identifying Government serial number stenciled on her side, but the floodlamp glinted greenly back from the fluorescent painting of her name: *Phoebe I.*

There was no stir of movement. The busy hum of voices was gone, the technicians vanished from their cluttered benches. The workroom lay empty, a place of waiting silence and black angular shadows.

"This isn't right," Gil said. "It isn't right at all."

XIII

DISTURBED by the unusual silence, Gil looked carefully into the deserted room, concern growing in his round face when the walls rattled his voice back at him. "I left Max Goff in charge with orders to keep the staff here under cover. Something has gone wrong, or they'd be here now."

The clang of a metal port swinging open interrupted him. Sound racketed about them, echoing in emptiness, bringing their attention back to the ship standing erect in the workroom shaft.

The stern entrance port stood open, letting out a flood of white light from the control room inside. Max Goff stood in the opening, still wearing stained laboratory whites, his red hair bristling more wildly than ever. He was peering in their direction against the floodlamp glare, and he held a shock-rod in his hand.

"Gil!" he called. He dropped down the short personnel ladder and came toward them, relief stamping his good-humored face. "Thank God you got through. I was afraid the police had cut you off."

"The police?" Gil repeated. "What

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happened, Max? Where are the rest of the staff?"

"I sent them away," Max said. "While there was still time."

He shook himself, regaining composure with an obvious effort. "Conniston has a crew of musclers and half the Metro police force out searching for you. Your escape from Ohio Peace Center made the visinews, and Conniston promptly put out a special bulletin offering a reward for you—alive. I think he's still convinced that he can win with your help, and he's determined to find you. They're combing the city, searching all buildings big enough to house the kind of laboratory he knows you'd set up, and they may come here at any minute."

"We'll have to run for it again, then," Gil said. His round shoulders slumped wearily. "There's no safety anywhere as long as Conniston thinks he can use us."

"Let's get out while we can," Max Goff urged. He looked back toward the sleek bulk of the *Phoebe I*, fidgeting with impatience. "I waited in the ship after the others left, hoping you'd make it here. We can go the way I'd planned to go if the police broke in before you came—through the roof."

Gil nodded reluctantly. "We've no other choice, if they find us . . . Conniston and Solar Services between them will have bought out the police completely by now, bucking each other, and neither side will give us up if we're caught. We'd never stand trial."

He turned toward the corridor leading to his office.

"Get Paul and Miss Nugent aboard the *Phoebe*, Max. I'll be with you as soon as I pick up some records."

He disappeared into the darkened corridor, and Max Goff turned eagerly toward the waiting ship. Shannon put a detaining hand on his arm, holding him back.

"You must keep a complete medical stock here," Shannon said. "Can you give Miss Nugent a stimulant of some sort? She's had a pretty rough time."

Goff hesitated. "Of course, but I haven't had time to move it aboard the ship. Come with me."

They went with him into another corridor parallel to the one Gil had taken. Ruth followed Shannon's lead without question, but he caught her puzzled look and squeezed her arm warningly. In a spotless first-aid room, Max Goff opened a white metal cabinet and ran a finger over the neat rows of bottles.

"Let it go," Shannon said. He took the dart-gun out of his pocket and turned it on Goff; something in his voice warned the red-haired technician and he turned quickly, reaching for the shock-rod in his belt.

"Careful," Shannon warned. "Put it on the table and stand back."

Goff stared at him, weighing the resolution in Shannon's face before he took the shock-rod gingerly from his belt and placed it on porcelain table under the cabinet.

Shannon took it up and beamed him down.

"He's only unconscious," he said when Ruth cried out. "Can't you see that this escape talk is only another trick to get us out of the way, to keep us quiet?"

He searched the medicine cabinet and took out a flat plastic case. Opened, it displayed a gleaming hypodermic needle and a neat row of minute ampules filled with a pale amber liquid.

"Hypnol!" Ruth said. Understanding widened her eyes. "So that's why you wanted to find their medical stock—you're going to get the truth from Gil with *that?*"

"If it will work with a Cubist," Shannon said grimly. "And I think it will."

WHEN they found Gil in his office he was stuffing papers into a brief case. He looked up at their entrance, surprise in his eyes when he saw that Max Goff was not with them. "Where's Max?"

Shannon put the hypnol case on the desk. "In the first-aid room. He'll be unconscious long enough for me to get

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most of the answers I want from you."

He opened the plastic kit, wincing a little at Gil's recoil from its glittering contents.

"I hate doing this, Gil, but you've put me off so persistently that I've finally realized you don't mean to tell me anything unless you're forced to. I'm only using the means at hand to get the information I need."

Gil wet his lips. "You're making a mistake, Paul. If you force that knowledge from me you'll regret it. It's not a thing you're supposed to know. It's against the Plan—"

"I thought so," Shannon said harshly. "The Plan—you *are* a Cubist, after all. I should have guessed it long ago, instead of letting friendship blind me."

He felt himself swept by a bleak and bitter futility when he considered the improbable chain of events that had led him to this. Against his will his whole life had been altered, stripped of all that he had valued. He had lost Ellen, and now Gil, and the emptiness of purpose that remained left him battered and weary and uncaring.

"You were at the bottom of it all," he said. "From the night of my landing you pulled the puppet strings that led me on here and held me back there. . . I should have known that when I realized that the fat man who answered my radophone call to you was lying. He was *waiting* for that call, to make certain I had landed and to find out where I was. He wouldn't have accepted a charge call from a stranger, otherwise.

"And the suit and wallet were more of the same deliberate misdirection, because no one but you or Ellen could have known where to find them. You must even have known where I was during those two years on Io, or you wouldn't have known when to expect me back. How?"

Gil smiled faintly. "It does sound like deliberate deception, doesn't it? Maybe the whole thing was a sort of psychological smoke screen put up to throw you on your own and see how you would react, to stretch you to your limits. Maybe it was a trial to learn if the cutting edge of a newly forged tool would be hard enough to stand up under the work it was designed for."

They faced each other across the desk, Shannon tense and wary, Gil relaxed and resigned. Ruth moved back from them and looked uneasily down the corridor toward the darkened laboratory, shivering a little at its air of vault-like emptiness.

Shannon called her back and passed Max Goff's shock-rod to her.

"Hold him with this," he ordered. He took up the hypnol needle and turned on Gil. "Don't make us beam you out, Gil. I'll only load you aboard ship and you'll wake up under hypnol. I'm through with being led about like a sheep. I want the truth!"

Gil shrugged helplessly. "Wait, Paul. I'll tell you what you want to know. I can't afford the time it would take to come out of a hypnol trance—I'm going to be needed here soon, and badly."

"So Goff's desperate escape story *was* just another red herring," Shannon said. "Conniston wouldn't be that anxious to get hold of you again. It was another dodge to get us out of—"

AT THAT moment the floor under his feet heaved sharply and subsided into a faint sustained trembling. A moment later the dull rumble of an explosion came to them, rattling the windows of the workroom, a deep and ominous roar muffled by distance.

"They've begun it," Gil said. He sat forward, a sudden shine of perspiration damping his forehead. "We'll have to hurry. . . Conniston has started his offensive, Paul. We'd better get out of here unless we mean to be caught in it."

Shannon shook his head stubbornly. "Tell me now. We'll run when we're forced to."

Gil sat back in his chair. The faint smile had come back to his face, showing the square edges of his wide-spaced teeth.

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"Do you remember the question I asked you on the way back from Peace Center? About the functioning of the human subconscious and its control of hormone action to maintain systemic balance among the body cells?"

"I remember," Shannon said. "Don't stall, Gil. Get to it!"

"I see you didn't recognize the analogy, plain as it is. Consider this—when the human body finds itself in a state of imbalance through cellular disorder, it releases a hormone designed to relieve that disorder by setting up a new and more stable balance. But would you say that the hormone itself is a responsible agent, or that it is intelligent? Does it know who or what sent it on its errand, or does the conscious mind of the body that contains it know?"

They stared at him, wordless before his sudden earnestness.

"The analogy is not perfect, but it serves; the Cubes fit roughly into the same category as the human body's hormones. The entirety of intelligent life on Earth—not the individual organisms that inhabit the globe, but their collective intelligence as a whole—forms a mental cell in the being of a cosmic creature that sprawls across a large part of our galaxy, an entity so vast that it is not even conscious of our existence.

"You know the unrest that technological progress has brought among men during the past few centuries—every man is literally at war with his neighbor, and that warring amounts to a rebellious malfunctioning of a body cell that refuses to work normally with others about it. Unchecked, that rebellion will spread to other worlds with the coming of stellar flight and set up new cells as wildly active as our own.

"The end result would be the same to that galactic entity as cancer to us, an uncontrollable malignancy that would eventually destroy its parent body. Do you understand now what the Cubes are and why they must win? Do you see that they are thrown against us like cosmic antibodies to bring stability—which is pure and simple peace—to us?"

"The governing subconscious of the galactic entity out there has finally sensed the danger center here, and has taken steps to eliminate it."

NOW another blast, closer this time, shook the warehouse. Above the rattling of windows Gil said clearly: "It's a staggering thought, isn't it, that in spite of all our striving we've managed to become only a minor irritant? That Earth has no more control over her destiny than a corpuscle in your bloodstream?"

It was more than staggering.

"It's not even a plausible lie," Shannon said. He shut his mind against the stunning concept, penning it away behind a wall of denial. "I want the truth, Gil, not a maniac dream."

Gil shook his head in a sort of terrible earnestness.

"It's no dream, Paul. Your individual cells are individually alive—how do you know they aren't intelligent too? Cancer is the result of cells deliberately multiplying themselves against the well-being of the body; if they're sentient, how would an influx of hormones trying to restore balance appear to them—like champions, or like invaders?"

"It's against all reason," Shannon said stubbornly. "If what you say is true, then why did the Bearer refuse Ruth and me yesterday at the Peace Center post? Why are some Cubists different from others?"

"Because you are cutting tools, and the time to use you has not come yet. As for the difference between Cubists, a society of sheep is stable but static; some of us must retain a modified initiative to keep the wheels turning."

The radophone on Gil's desk buzzed gently, a soft sound that fell like a thunderclap between them.

They froze, staring at each other. Ruth dropped her shockrod without noticing, watching the communicator screen with wide eyes.

"They couldn't have traced us here

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so soon," Shannon said. "Don't answer it—it may be a trap."

Gil shoved back his chair. "But it may be one of my staff, Paul, in trouble or trying to warn me. I'll have to answer it."

He pressed the activating stud on the radophone unit. The screen swirled briefly and came to life.

Zimmer Conniston looked out at them. "Lucas—thank God I got to you first!" he said urgently. "Get out of there and come to my headquarters—and hurry!"

ONLY two nights before, on the radophone at Ansel's pledge-shop, Shannon had been struck by the uncertainty in Conniston's manner, and tonight the Guild leader's harassment was too obvious to miss. It warped his heavy-jowled face into the slackness of near panic. His mane of gray hair was tangled and snarled; beard stubbled his cheeks, and the weariness of long-continued strain dulled the arrogance of his pale eyes.

"Hurry, man," Conniston urged. "Solar Services police are closing in on you—there's no time to argue!"

Gil cut him off sharply: "How do you know that? Who told you where to find me?"

Conniston's voice turned conciliatory. "I got the information from Campion, one of your technicians . . . but I didn't have time to use it before I learned that Orsham's crowd had picked up another of your staff and wrung him dry."

"Campion didn't tell you that willingly," Gil said. Anger roughened his mild voice. "You tortured that information out of him, Conniston, or you used hypnol. It won't help you; you've lost, can't you understand that? The rank and file of your organization aren't following the orders you gave them for wholesale slaughter—they're caught in the middle, like the public in general, and like the public they're turning to the Cubes to get out of the fighting. I've heard only two bombs so far—are your men quitting already?"

A heavier blast shook the warehouse to its foundations. The radophone screen swirled madly, rioting with flying blobs of color. When it steadied again Conniston's face had gone slack, his eyes blank with unbelief. An ugly bruise marked the Guild leader's cheek. His nose dripped blood, slowly.

"That was—close," he said hoarsely. "Solar—striking back. Or Government—"

He shook himself and turned his plea to Shannon, making a last bid to salvage a measure of success.

"You're a practical man, Shannon," Conniston said. His tone wheedling, at ridiculous variance with the black weight of his scowl. "Bring Lucas to me and I'll pay anything you ask. I'll clear you with Government. . . ."

Shannon cut him off in disgust. "Do you think I'd help you now, after what you did to Ellen and her mother? Conniston, you're a greater fool than I thought!"

"I'd forgotten the girl," Conniston said. He laughed suddenly, his pale eyes lighting. "I can bargain with you after all. Shannon, the muscle squad I sent to Peace Center brought back your fiancée before you were well out of Metro. Bring Lucas to me and I'll turn her over to you."

To Shannon it was like having the floor drawn suddenly from beneath his feet. If they had Ellen here, in Metro—

HE SAW the unlikeliness of it even before he heard Gil's warning: "Don't let him take you in, Paul. He's lying!"

"Of course he's lying," Shannon said. And to Conniston: "You aren't holding Ellen there. You'd have no reason to hold her after Gil and I were arrested as Peace Center. You've released her—or killed her."

Conniston lost all control, frustrated beyond endurance. "I tell you she's here, Shannon! Not in my offices, but in the building. Wait, I'll send for her—"

"You'll send a crew of musclers here

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instead," Shannon said. He turned his back on the screen, ignoring him. "Let's go, Gil. Keep ahead of me—I'm not through with you yet."

Ruth touched Shannon's arm hesitantly. "Can't we go to the *Ark* now, Paul? Please, I've got to get back to my father. He'll be frantic out there on—"

Shannon put a rough hand over her mouth, cutting her short.

"Solar Services is searching for the *Ark* out there already," he said in her ear. "Do you want Conniston after her, too?"

At the doorway he felt the fall of silence behind him and turned to see Conniston staring after them from the radophone screen, eyes intent with startled comprehension.

"Conniston heard that," Shannon said when they were in the corridor. "And he'll make the most of it. He'll have every patrol craft in the system alerted for us before we're out of atmosphere."

Ruth met his impatience with a defiant tilt of her chin, but the sudden brightness of her eyes and the trembling of her mouth gave her away. To Shannon the realization that she was near the breaking point came as a shock; it had seemed to him, engrossed in the headlong confusion of his search, that there was no limit to her stamina.

"Let him try," Gil said. "No patrol craft will ever overhaul you in the *Phoebe*." He paused at the corridor mouth to look with pride in his eyes at the sleek vertical bulk of the ship in the workroom shaft. "She's adapted to use Nugent's light-drive. Nothing short of the *Ark* will overtake her."

"The light-drive?" Ruth repeated incredulously. "How did you get hold of that?"

Gil gave her a square-toothed smile edged with cynicism. "Through one of your father's trusted staff. There are more—"

A heavy blast outside cut him short. The workroom floor shuddered under their feet from the concussion; dust settled in gray, tenuous plumes from the roof overhead. The sound had not died away when a sharper explosion above sent a gust of smoke billowing toward them from the roof stairwell.

"The police," Gil said. "Or Solar musclers—Conniston wasn't lying after all!"

They ran for the ship, the scuffing of their feet on the concrete floor drowned in the heavier sound of men rushing down the wooden staircase.

XIV

BEFORE pursuit appeared, they had reached the personnel ladder at the *Phoebe's* open port. Shannon boosted Ruth inside and put down a hand toward Gil, who had stopped short at the bottom rung.

"I'm not coming with you," Gil said. He stepped back, away from Shannon's hand. "I'm sorry, Paul—I hoped it wouldn't come to this sort of break between us. But there's no place in the Plan for me on Io."

Shannon turned the dart-gun on him. From behind, Ruth's hands pulled at him urgently. "Hurry, Paul! Let him go—they're coming—"

Shannon shook her off. "Climb up, Gil. Don't make me drag you!"

A police officer appeared on the stairway, others crowding after him. Metal glinted; something whispered past Shannon's face and exploded deafeningly against the farther wall of the workroom. He fired back without conscious intention, and felt his stomach lurch when the foot of the stairway disappeared in a gout of smoke and red flame. In the smoky tunnel of the stairwell a man screamed piercingly.

Gil stood fast at the foot of the ladder, a shadow of familiar Cubist serenity across his round, earnest face.

"It's no good, Paul," he said. "You couldn't change Ellen back; you couldn't change me, either. I told you the truth about the Cubes, back there in the office."

He turned and went toward the first-aid room where Shannon had left Max

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Goff unconscious. Shannon set a foot on the ladder to go after him, and drew it back when a shattering detonation outside smashed a twenty-foot opening in the workroom wall. Through the swirl of dust and smoke he glimpsed running figures pouring from the break, swarming in from the street outside.

He stepped back into the ship and slammed the port. Air hissed, sealing the lock. At the control panel Ruth called to him tautly without looking up from the relay studs under her hands: "Get down—we're blasting off!"

He ignored the warning, and found himself slammed to the floor by a sudden weight of acceleration that drove the breath from his lungs and struck a leaden paralysis into his limbs.

There was a rending clangor of tearing metal as the *Phoebe* ripped through the warehouse roof. The sound echoed deafeningly back and forth through the circular prison of the control room, and with its dying away the intolerable pressure left Shannon as suddenly as it had come.

He fought his way up from the edge of unconsciousness and sat up to orient himself. Ruth had turned in her place at the twin control chairs and was watching him.

"We're out of atmosphere," she said, "and ready to use the light-drive. We'll be on Io in less than an hour."

He thought wearily, sitting there on the floor while his bruised body mustered the strength to stand, that with her taking command of the situation she had reverted again to her old efficient self in the twinkling of an eye. Given her brown coveralls again instead of the stained and disheveled party dress, she would have looked exactly as she had looked the first time he ever saw her.

"And finding the *Ark* will put us back on schedule again, I suppose," Shannon said bitterly. "I'm still in good hands, is that it? The Plan takes a change of planets in its stride—why should it balk at a change in guardians for me?"

RUTH NUGENT came toward him, her dark eyes angry, and Shannon got up shakily to face her. "I never supposed for a minute that you really believed I was a Cubist," she said. "Would I have—oh, why do I bother trying to convince you? What difference does it make what you believe?"

"It makes no difference at all," Shannon said. Defeat rode him, bringing a sense of futility greater than he could bear to consider. "The Plan will be served. And that's all that matters, isn't it?"

With dull irrelevance he recalled a fanciful old account he had read at school of a man who had no country, condemned all his life to sail the seas without setting foot on land. That ancient, he thought, had suffered nothing by comparison; he, Shannon, had lost not only his country but his planet as well, his fiancée, his friend and all sense of belonging with his own species. Even on Io he had never guessed what being truly alone could be like; then there had been the Kyril for companionship and the anticipation of returning home to Earth to bolster him. Now there was left only an appalling emptiness and the prospect of being maneuvered about like a chess piece in an endless game played by an intangible but monstrously confident enemy.

"Will you open the shutters?" he asked. "I'd like to see what I'm leaving behind."

She touched a stud that rolled the port shutters back like jointed spools of metal tape into the walls, and he could see outside into space.

The ship lay full in the dull red cone of Earth's penumbra, with Earth to one side and the sun hidden behind her; on the other side hung the red-orange crescent of Mars and the silver disk of Jupiter, and beyond them a glittering uncountable myriad of stars.

Looking down the cone of the penumbra was like sighting along a great round tunnel that dwindled in sharp perspective, dim with blood-hued shadow

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and truncated abruptly by Earth's night-side hemisphere, toward a monstrous black disk edged with a sullen furnace-glow of air-diffracted sunlight.

To Shannon Earth looked like a world on fire, and it came to him as he watched that the thought was no hysteric symbolism but a literal awareness of global holocaust. Earth *was* on fire, burning as she had burned for millenia with the senseless perpetual warrings of her children.

But until now the fire had smoldered, building slowly; and in its present final fury it had accomplished nothing but the drawing of alien monitors from *out there* to extinguish its burning. . . .

And freedom with it.

The thought brought a sharp recurrence of the shock he had felt when Gil Lucas told him what lay behind the Cubes. He could see Gil's face again, harassed and reluctant, and hear the deadly seriousness of his voice detailing the terrible simplicity of circumstance that had set the Plan into motion.

FOR the first time belief came to Shannon, bringing a sense of reality more chilling in the detachment of black space than he could have felt on Earth. Horror shook him like a plunge into icy water; when he turned from the ports back to Ruth he was trembling uncontrollably.

"What if Gil was right?" he asked. "What if there really *is* some sort of cosmic brute hovering out there in space, using us but too big to be conscious of us?"

She considered the question calmly, and her composure surprised and shamed him when he saw that she had already accepted the postulation as a reality and had adapted herself to it.

"Suppose there is?" she asked. "It's been there all the time, then, and it's no threat to us as long as we don't force it to action by the sort of anarchy that has put Earth where she is. With a nucleus like the *Ark's* crew we can start over out there somewhere, and do a better job of it than we did on Earth. It needn't be the end at all, but the beginning."

He found her confidence inordinately comforting, her calm acceptance as soothing as a sedative.

Understanding of his own panic came like a corollary to the logic she offered—his fear had not been for his personal safety, it was the individual's instinctive terror at the prospect of racial death. For a man to die among his fellows is a terrifying but commonplace thing, but for the last man alive—knowing that after him there will be no others, that the perpetuity of which he has been a part is about to cease forever—it could be infinitely more awful.

And if a group could escape the Cubist subjugation of Earth and transplant humanity like a hardy perennial among the stars, carrying with it the phoenix of human immortality. . . .

"I think you're right," Shannon said. He thought of the virgin worlds lying empty and waiting in space, and the challenge of their strangeness flicked his imagination with a quick stir of interest. "If you are, we're wasting time. Let's get on to the *Ark*."

Side by side they sat at the control panel. Ruth's fingers moved nimbly over the instrument studs, feeding data into the calculator banks, transferring resulting graphs to the integrator section while she plotted their course. She talked as she worked, and Shannon listened intently.

"We don't have to calculate solar orbits with the light-drive," Ruth said. "We're not subject to centrifugal balances and orbital escapement speeds. Planetary ellipses are too small to matter—we've only to consider basic galactic motion and the tangenital drift of the sun. Gravitic strains are everywhere, no matter how far apart. . . ."

"I'm afraid it's no use," Shannon said. "I know you're trying hard to keep it to my level, but I'm not even a lay phyiscist."

She laughed at his bafflement.

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"Then I'll use a basic analogy the professors developed to give students a visual idea of gravitic action. Imagine a horizontal sheet of rubber, tightly stretched, with a marble lying on it; the surface is under a steady strain, but the marble does not move because all stresses are equally balanced. Now depress the surface, distorting the normal strain pattern, and the marble rolls toward the center of distortion. Space is full of such static strains—the ship's engines distort them as they are reached, and its mass is moved in a uniform direction by their effort to regain normal shape. The faster the ship moves, the more strains are distorted and the greater the gravitic reaction. Velocity gained never equals the speed of light, since light-speed is the ultimate limit of the medium's elasticity, but it comes close—very close. There is no dominating attraction of the ship toward any one body because the ship remains constantly in a distorted space where there is no gravity as such but only motion, the releasing and reshaping of spatial strains moving the ship forward in order to be rid of their distortions."

"You make it almost simple," Shannon said. "But shouldn't that kind of acceleration crush the entire crew to a pulp?"

She laughed again, pleased that he should have touched so quickly on a crucial point. "We don't accelerate against gravity, only against inertia. Actually, there's no acceleration of the ship at all in relation to crew or cargo; the distortion of space moves the passenger with the ship, don't you see? In a sense, the section of space in which the ship lies moves with it, too."

"You're out of my depth again," Shannon said. He lit a cigarette and leaned back, watching her curiously. "But I'll take your word for it. You should know, having helped built the *Ark*."

She fed a last tape traced with a series of improbable curves into the integrator and touched a stud set carefully apart from the rest.

"We're on light-drive," she said. "Look outside."

HE STOOD in awe before the ports, shaken and at the same time curiously exhilarated by the strangeness that had crept into the familiar space beyond the plastiglass panels.

Space ahead was no longer black. A faint pearly luminescence glowed throughout it, shot through with a million starpoints familiar in placement but blazing in crescendo like a shower of sparks from a brazer's wheel. Their colors changed while he watched; yellow suns turned white, the white turned blue and then violet . . . and vanished.

Behind the *Phoebe* the sun's glare dulled from white to a sullen, brooding red. Shannon turned, startled, and found himself able to stare directly at it without discomfort, a dull and ominous coin-sized disk set against a blackness deeper than his perception could grasp.

"It looks like a dying coal," he breathed. "Like a cinder out of hell!"

Ruth came to stand beside him, laughing, delighted as another woman might have been delighted at showing off an expensive original gown.

"Doppler effect," she said. "You've heard of it all your life—it's been measured in starlight for hundreds of years. But it's strange to *see* it, isn't it?"

He let his breath out raggedly. "It's—terrible. What would happen if we struck a meteor or an asteroid at this rate? A fission blast?"

"You've touched on the one thing about the drive that makes stellar speeds possible," she said. "The distortion-bubble created by the ship's engines goes ahead of us, as it must if the space strain behind it is to move us on, and any matter in its way is carried along with it. A meteor caught in the field loses its gravitic weight, keeping only its inertia, but it never reaches the ship—it precedes it. When we come out of light-drive the accumulated matter ahead comes out with us at the same rate of

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speed, so that it's not dangerous. We've only to move through it or around it."

She looked thoughtful. "Father and Alec say that the *Ark* might even drive through the heart of a planet without being damaged. I hope they're right!"

They stood at the ports and watched together until a signal chimed at the instrument board and Ruth went back to her controls. There was no sense of strain nor of deceleration, but the violet points of stars began to break through the luminous haze ahead, shifting swiftly back down the spectrum to their normal colors. Sunlight returned behind them, bright and yellow.

"We're coming out," Ruth said. A brief puff of dust swirled past the ports and was gone, glittering like powdered mica in the sunlight. "A meteor, or what's left of it," she said. "Look—we're inside Callisto's orbit already. There's Io!"

Jupiter dominated the sky like a huge silvery ball, flattened and banded with murky striae, holding his satellite system to him like a jealous giant. Shannon picked out the icy white crescent of Callisto and for the thousandth time let his fancy run on what might have been.

"I was headed for Callisto when the *Flora* went out of control and cracked up on Io," he said. "I wonder how it would be now if I could have made that trip safely, without losing that two years? Ellen and I—"

Ruth broke in without seeming to hear him. "You'd better strap in. I'm going to change course for landing."

They settled toward a bleak and desolate landscape as familiar to Shannon as the back of his hand, a cruel and pitiless place of jagged obsidian ledges and green flame-vines spotted with blatant flowers. There was no sign of the *Ark* nor of any human habitation.

He was about to protest that no ship the size of the *Ark* could be hidden on Io when Ruth grounded the *Phoebe* at the base of a towering basalt mesa, and he saw that it was not a true tableland but only a splintered outcropping that rose like a wall from the floor of a giant ravine. From the outcrop to the canyon wall on either side a cunningly latticed screen had been swung, camouflaged so that its upper surface blended with the twisted Ionian scenery.

XV

UNDER the screen lay the *Ark*, ports open, armed men scurrying in tight knot about her to outlying emplacements. Shannon caught a glimpse of Alec Blair's slight figure, bare sandy hair glinting in the low sunlight as he ran. Dace Nugent appeared in the rearmost port of the *Ark*, the stubby bulk of an exploder cradled in his arms.

The camouflage was clever enough, but Nugent's allowing a strange ship to land within a hundred yards of his own was proof enough that the *Ark* was equipped with nothing in the way of offensive weapons. They had stocked nothing, apparently, but hand guns; the *Ark*, Shannon thought derisively, would be a sitting duck for even the smallest patrol boat equipped with a seeker-missile launcher.

He had expected Ruth to rush out at once when he opened the port, and was surprised when she did not. Even when the *Ark's* crew recognized her and Dace Nugent came running across the rocky ground toward them she showed no eagerness. Instead she turned a troubled face to Shannon, more hesitant than he had seen her since they first met.

"I'm glad you're coming with us," she said. And, before he could answer: "Please don't be bitter about what you've lost, Paul. You did all that could be done—more than anyone else I've ever known could have done."

He considered her words, searching for a hint of irony, and found none.

"What else is there to do?" he asked, indifferently.

She bit her lip and turned to the port ladder. Shannon followed, frowning faintly, disturbed by an unaccountable sense of being somehow in the wrong.

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Dace Nugent met them at the bottom of the ladder, his lined face alight with relief. He caught his daughter to him, found the exploder an encumbrance, and flung it away to be rid of it. The two of them stood together wordlessly until Shannon shifted restively. The *Ark's* crew streamed toward them from their makeshift guard emplacements, cheering.

"You got back just in time," Nugent said huskily. "I've gone half insane here, trying to work out some way to find you without giving the *Ark* away. Another day and we'd have had to blast off without you."

"Shannon brought me back," Ruth said. She drew away from her father, her eyes shining. "We took the long way, but we're here."

Nugent held out his hand to Shannon, and drew it back blankly when Shannon ignored it. "You'd really have gone without her?" Shannon demanded incredulously. "You'd have left her back there in that hellhole?"

Ruth laughed, a light peal of sound oddly at variance with the bleak Ionian silence. "My father is a practical idealist, Paul. We all are, or we wouldn't have organized this Cygni expedition in the first place. The project, along with the new start for humanity it represents, is more important than any of us."

WHEN Shannon said nothing she added pointedly: "There were several times when you could have abandoned me on that Peace Center foray, remember? Why didn't you?"

"I don't know," Shannon said. "Perhaps because it didn't occur to me."

The Nugents laughed together. The *Ark's* crew surrounded them, smiling, congratulting Ruth, shaking Shannon's hand against his will.

"We're all here now," Dace Nugent said.

Alec Blair came up, panting, and Nugent turned on him exultantly. "Get the astrogation team to work, Alec. We blast off as soon as you can give us a course."

"We'll need eight hours," Blair said. He looked at Ruth then and smiled wryly. "Welcome home, darling. . . ."

SHANNON let them lead him through the great hulk of the *Ark* from cargo holds to astrogation room, listening without comment to their detailing of the ship's arrangements. At another time his engineer's sense of thoroughness would have been delighted with her construction and appointment, but at the moment his feeling of personal loss at thought of abandoning Ellen and Earth was too crushing to leave room for appreciation.

He met the *Ark's* crew, and was forced in spite of himself to admire Nugent's shrewdness in estimating character. The *Ark* was manned by an eminently capable staff, a cheerful but resolute group which clearly could be expected to live together sensibly and without friction. Most of them were technicians of one sort or another and so not likely to make the hardiest of pioneers, but they were handpicked for stability.

Midway of the ship they paused in a thick-walled room tiered with coffin-sized chambers like recessed vaults. Nugent opened one and slid out a hermetically sealed plastiglass chest, padded with foam rubber and equipped with a self-contained air purifier.

"This is the thing we like least about protracted flight," he said. "But the length of the trip makes it unavoidable. Some of us are no longer young—competent specialists seldom are—and twelve years more will see us too old to be useful when we arrive. We've provided metabolic suspension chambers for the older members and for the sick or injured whose treatment may take considerable time."

Idly Shannon counted the vaults, and found their number surprisingly small. "Fifty-eight," he said, "when your number must be twice that. Why not a cell for each member?"

Nugent laughed and looked at Ruth.

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"There was some discussion on that point, but since the aim of a colonizing expedition is to populate new worlds as quickly as possible we elected to leave the younger members of the crew active during the entire trip. There are one hundred eight of us, twenty-seven men and eight-one women, of whom fifty-eight will sleep through the trip unless emergency forces their awakening. The others will be busy maintaining the ship's operation and bringing up the new generation."

"The new generation?" Shannon repeated.

Understanding came, increasing his respect for Nugent's astuteness. "I see. By the time you reach 61 Cygni there should be children old enough to help with the colonizing."

"We've provided nurseries and schooling facilities," Nugent said. "With emphasis on the schooling. There is no human failing, including man's natural belligerence, that can not be tempered by proper training. These children will have a better opportunity to grow into really stable adults than any group ever before born."

"It sounds very efficient," Shannon said. A memory from his copter flight with Ruth to Peace Center came back to amuse him briefly. "Will you select your marital — groups — according to their special abilities, or leave that to choice?"

"Choice, of course," Ruth said. She flushed at his sardonic glance, and he knew that she remembered the incident as well. "One thing is certain, Mr. Shannon—there'll be no *bargains* driven in the selecting!"

They passed on to the forward section of the ship and found the astrogation room a place of quiet activity. A five-man team of astronomers and mathematicians worked busily at a bank of computing machines and integrators, plotting the *Ark's* flight-line to 61 Cygni.

Alec Blair was in charge, too engrossed in his work to spare them more than a nod of recognition and a cooly appraising glance at Shannon. They went on to the shuttered observation chamber at the bow, where Shannon stood in half-listening inattention to Nugent's monologue and stared out through the open port across the Ionian badlands.

DOWN the ravine that hid the *Ark* a vague suggestion of disharmony in the angular landscape caught his eye, a hint of roundness that jarred against the ragged patterns of unweathered stone. He made up his mind at once, feeling a slight lift of excitement, that it was either an improbably rounded boulder embedded in the ravine side, or it was the Kyril.

"I'm going out," he said abruptly, and went to the port. They stared at him blankly, and he shrugged off their unspoken questions.

"Be careful," Nugent warned. "It's getting dark, and the lava-lions will be out."

"I know the lava-lions," Shannon said. "If I'm not back before blastoff time, leave me. It won't make a great deal of difference."

He went down the ravine with a growing sense of anticipation, as if he were on the way to meet an old and valued friend. His uncertainty was settled within a matter of minutes.

It was the Kyril. . . .

"You are late," the Kyril said. Its telepathic voice was as cool and unhurried as ever; the familiarity of it gave Shannon a strangely comforting sense of continuity, as if the ordeal on Earth had been only a dream and he had never been away from Io. "I had begun to think that I would have to call to you, Paul Shannon, and perhaps alarm the others."

Shannon sat on his haunches, unconsciously assuming a position he had used a thousand times before with his enigmatic friend, and looked curiously at the Kyril's lichened shape.

"You said when I left Io for Earth that I had grown away from my people, that there would be times when I might

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wish I had remained here. Did you know then what was happening to my world, Kyril? Do you know everything?"

"I knew what you would find there," the Kyril said. "But I could not tell you. You had to learn for yourself, to solve your problems in your own way or to fail before them."

Shannon stood up, startled by the inference. "You know all the time? Then why—"

He drew back, struck by a sudden icy certainty. "Kyril, you're a prime mover in this madman's dream! You fit into it somehow just as Gil Lucas did!"

"Your friend told you the truth," the Kyril said. "He would have spared you that, but you were determined—and difficult. Are you any the happier now for understanding?"

Shannon found himself in a confusion of conflicting emotions. Anger flared in him against the Kyril, an anger tempered by an equal chill of uneasiness at the thought of its being part of the vast and alien thing that had brought this about.

"It's too fantastic for belief," Shannon said. "And yet—"

"Yet it is true," the Kyril answered. "No single cell of your body could exist without the whole, because it is the complete entity that gives each its life. The greater entity that sent the Cubes to Earth gave life to you and to Earth, as to others throughout this galaxy. Will you resent its necessity of quieting the chaos on Earth in order to preserve itself? Would you permit a cell of your own to grow wild and destroy you, if you could prevent it?"

ONCE again the sense of facing a concept too great for understanding set Shannon to trembling. If Earth had reached such a pitch of rebellion before the appearance of the Cubes became necessary, then there must be other and more peaceful worlds that had not needed correction, and never would. . . .

"Earth is an exceptional case," the Kyril said, keeping pace with Shannon's thought. "Man is one of the few species so bellicose that he could not attain balance by himself. If he had been more rational and less greedy, all this would not have been necessary."

The silent voice went on. "Stellar flight would have come in time, when men were ready for it as a race. You have been taught that self-preservation is the strongest law of life; it is not. Adventurers in all times have ventured in flimsy boats across unknown seas, in the face of death, because in them was implanted the instinct to spread sentient lift further across first a continent, then a globe, and after that across space. But such instruments as are used by the galactic entity to spread its sentience must be at peace with themselves; if they are unbalanced members of a culture living in imbalance, then the newer extensions of that culture also will be undisciplined and dangerous to the whole. Do you follow me?"

It was imposible not to follow. Shannon's unbelief died under the Kyril's cool certainty, and a numb assent succeeded it.

"The galactic entity, like yourself, must grow to maturity by the addition of new cells to its being," the Kyril said. "A new cell grows from a stable nucleus, which must prove itself suitable for survival before it may divide to form a new one. And that nucleus may fail at the last moment if it lacks strength or wisdom to meet the trials it must encounter. If it survives it will have been tempered and sharpened like a tool in a forge, adapted by its conditioning to the purpose for which it is intended.

"You are such a tool, tempered for the part you are to play. Dace Nugent and his staff are others. If you can work together there is no reason why you should not establish the stable culture which should have been Earth's in the beginning. That is all, Paul Shannon. Does it satisfy your need to know?"

"Wait," Shannon said. "What is your part in this? And what sort of world

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are we heading toward on this flight of the *Ark's?*"

"The Cubes are insentient instruments," the Kyril said. "I am their director, designed solely to control them in their work. As for the worlds ahead —all life is not intelligent, and only intelligence is acceptable for inclusion into the galactic entity's being. The worlds you will reach are peopled by a subhuman species which is not acceptable and is—not pleasant. And there are other worlds and systems beautiful beyond your conception, but empty and waiting."

A picture came to Shannon from the Kyril of the dark endless reaches of space, studded with suns orange and blue and white and red, of green worlds and dead worlds and worlds of darkness and water and others of wind and sand an fire, and the magnificence and the terrible beauty of the picture awed and exhilarated him beyond the ability of his senses to endure it.

He suffered a brief dizziness that rose from his struggle to contain the intolerable knowledge he had been given, and when his vision cleared the Kyril was gone. . . .

XVI

THE sound of footsteps brought him back to awareness with a jerk.

The sun had gone down, and with the brief gloom of evening Jupiter rose in a second dawn of cold silver light that made Io's jagged landscape into a fantastic fairyland. The parent planet's vast banded bulk filled the sky, and by its pale flood of light Shannon saw that it was not a lava-lion that came toward him.

It was Ruth Nugent, and she had not gone back to the brown coveralls after all.

She had changed instead from the bedraggled party dress to another whose color Shannon could not make out in the hueless planet-glow, but which gave her a warm and undeniable femininity from which even the chill efficiency of the exploder under her arm could detract nothing.

"I've come to take you back to the *Ark,*" she said when Shannon stood up before her. Her eyes studied him with enigmatic attention, dark and wide in the half light. "We blast off in another thirty minutes. I was afraid something had happened to you."

He went toward her, puzzled and a little shocked by the feeling that surged up in him. "No. I talked with the Kyril and learned what I wanted to know, that Gil told us the truth. I learned something else, too, with the Kyril's help."

When she stood quietly he went on: "Understanding what has happened already and something of what lies ahead of us, I asked myself what sort of choice I would make now if I had the power of going back two years and starting over. And I discovered that I don't want my old life back. The Earth I used to know was never what I thought it; when I think of humanity as a whole I find myself comparing it to that poor stupid little Titanian, dying on its feet of its own dissipations while it aped the thing it idolized. Earth has nothing left for me, and for the first time in my life I'm at peace with myself. I'm looking forward to that flight to Cygni."

She said in a small, careful voice, "And Ellen? You're giving her up with Earth?"

He made a futile, wordless sound. "I know how this will sound, but I can't help it. I think I've changed more than Ellen has. I couldn't be happy with Ellen now even if she were not a Cubist. I think I've outgrown everything about the old life I knew—I think we've all outgrown it, else we wouldn't be out here ready to jump off to the stars."

She sighed, and the uncertainty went out of her voice.

"I think I understand. . . I've changed too, since that flight to Peace Center, more than I ever imagined I could. If I hadn't I couldn't have made myself break off with Alec this evening."

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He took a step nearer, trying to see what was in her eyes. "You broke with Alec? Why?"

"For the same reason you're giving up Ellen," she said. "Because Alec is considerate and good and a very brilliant physicist, but he's only a dry little man who could never give me what I've had for the past few days—strength and confidence, and the certainty of never being alone or afraid any more."

He said wonderingly, "But that's the way I feel, though I couldn't put it like that. I think that's when I first realized I had outgrown the old life , when I understood that none of this would have any meaning for me without you in it."

They stood for a moment with the planet-shine bright between them, shaken by the thing that had come to them.

"I've a one-track mind," Shannon said almost humbly. And there wasn't room in it for you when we made that flight to Peace Center. But I'll have twelve years to make it up to you, Ruth."

She took the step that remained between them.

"More than that," she said. Her mouth had gone heavy and soft, and the warmth and tenderness of her recalled vividly to Shannon the night she had comforted him in the pledge-shop alley. "Much more than twelve years, Paul. And you won't have to bargain with anyone for me, now or ever. . . ."

IT WAS almost time for the blastoff when they went back to the ship. Dace Nugent met them at the *Ark's* stern port, his square face lined and harsh with strain.

"I was on the point of going to look for you," he said. "There's a ship less than a hundred miles away out there, and I think it's scanning for us. We'll have to hurry."

He was making the port fast when Alec Blair's voice called urgently down the corridor, halting him. "Leave it open," Blair said. He came up to them, breathing hard, his mild eyes glinting with inner tension. "I'm going out and set mines in the *Phoebe*—we don't want them following us in her. The astrogation team is asking for you in the control room, Dace."

When Nugent had gone, Blair put out an unexpected hand to Shannon.

"Ruth put me straight about you earlier in the evening," he said. "I wish you both luck. I won't say I'm happy about everything, of course, but getting the *Ark* to 61 Cygni is the important thing."

He left them and went down the ladder into the Ionian night. Ruth put her arm through Shannon's, not trusting herself to speak, and they went together through the ship toward the control room.

They found the astrogation team grouped tautly about the master telescreen, their plotting task forgotten. "They found us," someone said unnecessarily when Ruth and Shannon came in. "To have been so close, and then to lose. . . ."

From the screen a thin young man in the uniform of a patrol captain looked out at them, his face tight and determined.

"We have orders direct from Government, at Mr. Conniston's special request, to hold you," he said. "Don't try to lift your ship. We have an atomic meteor-seeker missile triggered to your mass—you'd be blasted to bits before you could begin acceleration."

He turned his head briefly to give an order. "Cut in the beam relay. Put Mr. Conniston on."

Zimmer Conniston's face replaced the patrol captain's, his scowl a little blurred by the distortion of a tight-beam relay. He singled out Dace Nugent instantly, ignoring the others.

"I don't want the *Ark* crippled, Nugent," he said. "My staff and I are going with you. There's nothing left for us on Earth—it's like a madhouse there, and will be until the last man has turned Cubist."

"We can't take you," Nugent said. "We're a picked crew, Conniston—having your kind along would defeat the

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purpose of the project. We'd only be starting over with the same sort of insanity we had on Earth."

Conniston shifted his scowl to Shannon. "Hold them there until I come, Shannon. I've brought along an inducement to make it worth your while."

He turned his head. "Put the girl on the screen."

Someone shoved Ellen Keyne into view. She met Shannon's stricken look and smiled faintly, unsurprised, wearing her serenity like a mantle of inviolable calm.

"You'll get her back if you can keep that crew of fanatics from wrecking the *Ark*," Conniston said. "It's up to you, Shannon. All of us go to 61 Cygni, or none."

His scowl lightened at the indecision in Shannon's face. "Have all the ports opened to make sure they don't try to lift the ship while the patrol crew is taking over. My own ship is just inside the Martian ellipse—I'll be there in another twenty hours."

Shannon took the dart-gun out of his pocket and turned it on Dace Nugent. "Send men to open the ports. Do as he says—and hurry!"

HE WENT himself to the stern port, running through the *Ark's* echoing corridors with the bitter memory of Ruth's stricken face accusing him.

He was through the stern port that Alec Blair had left open and halfway down the personnel ladder when the clanging of other ports opening sounded up and down the *Ark's* polished length. The vertical spindle of the *Phoebe* stood outside where he had left it, waiting for him. He thought of Blair then, setting mines to destroy the little ship, and felt a cold chill of desperation. He had to reach it before—

Ruth's voice from above froze him briefly. "Paul, don't go! It isn't worth it, just when we've found each other—I know what you're trying to do, but—"

"It's the only way," he insisted.

In his mind he could see how simple it would be, and knew that it could not fail. The *Phoebe's* smaller bulk rising from beyond the focus of the patrol craft's triggered seeker-missile, flashing up at near-light speed like a great bullet toward the descending ship. Then. . . .

"Ellen is on Conniston's ship," Ruth said. She came down the ladder toward him. "Would you leave her now?"

"Go back," he said, and moved downward again. "She's a Cubist. What is death, or anything else, to her?"

He stepped from the ladder—and was flung back, deafened and half stunned, when the *Phoebe* flashed up and out of sight with a shattering blast.

The blinding glare of collision in space touched him with a wave of heat like the opening of a furnace door. When he could see again Ruth was beside him.

"Poor Alec—he didn't come out to mine the *Phoebe!* He knew what had to be done as soon as the patrol ship challenged us. . . .Do you rememeber what he said when he left us, Paul? That the *Ark's* reaching Cygni was all that mattered?"

"I remember," Shannon said.

From the port above them someone called urgently: "Blastoff—hurry!"

Later, in the acceleration room, they lay side by side on their padded couches, listening to the excited hum of voices about them as the rest of the *Ark's* crew strapped themselves down against the blastoff. At the last moment Shannon put out a hand across the few inches of intervening space to hold Ruth's, and she smiled without fear or uncertainty.

"The world is starting over again, Paul," she said. "You're not sorry?"

"I'll never be sorry," he said.

He thought of the picture the Kyril had shown him, of the endless velvet space ahead, and of the shining colored suns that swung against it.

"They'll wait," he said irrelevantly. "They've waited for millenia. What does another twelve years matter?"

They were holding hands and laughing together when the *Ark* rushed up into the sky, toward the stars. ● ● ●

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"It wouldn't be legal to marry"

PROPOSAL

By L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

What does a nice girl do when a scaly alien wants to marry her?

WHEN Alice Wernecke walked up the path to the Greers' house she was mildly interested in the fact that the thing from that planet, which was staying with the Greers, would be there. Meeting it would be an interesting experience and all that.

But that was not the main consideration. She had read enough about these extra-terrestrials in the newspapers and magazines, and seen them enough on television, so that meeting one would cause no great shock. And they were certainly nothing pretty to look at; not at all human (barring the fact that they had two arms, two legs, and a head) but not much like anything else on earth either.

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These Wolfians had certainly made the human race look silly, after all those important people had gone to so much trouble and appropriated so much money for a World Space Authority under the United Nations, and made so many dull speeches about the dawn of a new era. Because when they got their moon-ship half built, the ship from the planet of the star Wolf number something had landed in Africa. The sixteen extra-terrestrials aboard had solemnly announced that they were paying a visit, and would the earthmen be so kind as to explain everything about this planet to them?

The fact uppermost in Alice's mind, however, was not the presence of the alien, but that of his guide and mentor, that Mr. Matthews from the State Department. Mr. Matthews was a kind of cousin of the Greers. He was unmarried, and for months the Greers had been promising to introduce him to Alice. The trouble was that Mr. Matthews worked—dreadfully hard, said the Greers—in Washington, and seldom got to the Philadelphia suburbs. Now, however. . . .

ALICE also felt a little guilty about the fact that her roommate Inez Rogell was not coming to this party—though there was no reason why she should. The Greers had asked Alice, not Inez, who was no great asset to a party anyway.

Harry Greer let her in and introduced her round. The being from Wolf whatsit stood at the far end of the room holding his cocktail in one hand and resting the knuckles of the other on the ground. The remarkable shortness of his legs and length of his arms made this possible. The creature was covered with a wrinkled gray leathery hairless skin that gave the impression of being very thick, like that of an elephant. His head reminded Alice a little of that of a turtle, though the skull bulged enough to accommodate a decent share of brains. Aside from a wrist-watch and a thing like a musette-bag slung from one shoulder, the being wore no clothes or ornaments, and aside from his large opalescent eyes and his beak-mouth there was nothing about him that could be definitely identified with a corresponding organ on an earthly organism. He was not quite so tall as Alice's five-four.

Harry Greer said: "Alice, this is—" and here he uttered a name that sounded something like "Stanko". "Stanko, this is Miss Wernecke, who teaches our youngest."

Stanko opened the musette-bag. Alice had a glimpse inside and saw that it was full of a fountain-pen, an address-book, and other things such as an earthly man might carry in his pockets. He brought out and extended a calling-card, which read:

Kstāho 'Agû Lozlek Haāg
Cultural Representative,
Wolf 359-I

At the same time Stanko (as Alice continued to think of him despite the hieroglyphics on the card) said slowly: "I am glad to meet Miss Wernecke. Does she teach that one child only, or others as well?"

The accent was not bad—at least most of the sounds were recognizable—but the voice had a curiously inhuman flat quality, as when a man speaks with an artificial larynx.

While Harry Greer answered Stanko's question, Mary Greer presented Alice to the tall man with dark hair thinning on top who stood next to the extra-terrestrial. Now Alice's interest really soared, for Mary announced that this was "Byron Matthews, who I've been telling you about."

"And she's told me about you, too," said Byron Matthews.

Alice wished that Mary had not poured it on quite so thickly. Nothing nips a beautiful friendship in the bud like the suspicion of the people concerned that they are being thrown together for matchmaking purposes. Still, this did look like a possibility. If not exactly handsome, Byron Matthews had a distinguished air and a pleasant man-

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ner. Certainly he was an improvement over anything in Alice's present stable: that twerp John, who taught English at Darbydale High, or Edward, who clerked at the Darbydale National Bank, or the two or three occasionals. . . .

When she had shaken hands, Alice straightened up and drew back her shoulders to make the most of her assets. She was acutely conscious of Matthews's glance as it took in her freshly-set golden hair, her best blue afternoon frock matching her eyes, and her lush figure which careful dieting kept on the safe side of plumpness. She said:

"My goodness, Mr. Matthews, you don't look like one of those terrible State Department people one reads about."

Matthews gave a theatrical wince. "Young lady, if the State Department were as bad as its critics for the last two centuries have been saying, the Republic would have ceased to exist. But then, it's an axiom of American politics that the better the Department is the worse it gets criticized."

"How awful! Why is that?"

"Because we have to take a long view and consider the whole world, which puts us on the unpopular side of many questions. Most folks, especially Congressmen, would rather take a short view and forget the rest of the world. Now that we have to start considering other planets as well it'll be even worse."

"You poor things! Are you staying up here to keep an eye on Mr. Stanko,"

"That's right. The Wolfians decided that the most profitable use to make of their time was to scatter and sample various earthly environments. So one is living with a family of Chinese peasants, another with a family of decayed European aristocrats in Denmark, another in a Catholic monastery in Quebec, and another with the Camayura Indians of Brazil. Kstãho was assigned to sample life in a typical suburban-bourgeois home in the United States."

"I think he got the best deal of the lot," said Alice, absent-mindedly accepting the martini that Harry Greer handed her. "How long will he be here?"

"About five months. Then they all fly back to Africa to take off for home."

"What do you do meanwhile?"

"I stay at the Swarthmore Inn, and during the day I take our guest sightseeing."

"You'll be here all that time?"

"Unless Congress decides the State people are all Wolfians in disguise and cuts off our salaries."

THEN Mary Greer pulled Alice off to meet a couple more people, and there was a general scrimmage for a while. The other guests, once they had gotten over their initial nervousness towards Stanko, crowded round and plied him with questions:

"How d' you like this lousy Philadelphia climate?" "Have you been to a football game yet?" "Do they have insurance on this planet of yours?" "What do you think of American women?" "Aw, don't embarrass the poor guy, George; he thinks they're inhuman monsters." "Well, sometimes I think they are too. . . ."

The extra-terrestrial responded in his slow way, taking his time for solemnly exact answers. The milling of the party —and some volition on her part— brought Alice back into proximity with Byron Matthews, though she let it seem accidental. This time their discourse got to where he was saying, with more hesitation and evident trepidation than one would expect of a rising young diplomat:

"Uh, I thought maybe while I'm here, uh, maybe we could get together some time. Uh. You know, have dinner out or something."

Alice smiled her best. "That's sweet of you, Byron! Or maybe I could feed you some night? You must get awfully tired of restaurant food."

"I do at that. Do you mean you can cook as well as teach?"

"I should be able to! My folks are Pennsylvania Dutch . . ."

The flat mechanical voice of the Wolfi-

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an cut in: "Mr. Matthews, I have not yet seen one of your schools in operation. As Miss Wernecke is a teacher, could I perhaps watch her teach?"

"How about it, Alice?" said Matthews.

"Oh, goodness," said Alice. "If Mr. Stanko comes in to one of our classes the kids will be so distracted nothing will be taught, and he won't see what he came for. Suppose I send him up to the High School? He'd find Mr. Lorbeer's science class interesting."

That, she thought will fix *that* old goat's wagon. She had good reasons for disliking Mr. Lorbeer. The previous year, when she had been doing her practice teaching at the Lowland Avenue School in Darbydale to qualify for her Pennsylvania State teaching license, Mr. Lorbeer had been her supervisor sent by the University to check up on her along with the other would-be teachers who were finishing the University's education course. And he had driven poor Alice nearly crazy slinking around hinting that she would be sure of a good grade if she would only tender him the ultimate in female hospitality. Otherwise—out, and she had seen enough of his arbitrary firings of student teachers to know that he meant it. (One unlucky youth whom everybody else considered promising material had been tossed out at the end of his first day for what Mr. Lorbeer had reported as "intangibles.") The facts that he had a wife somewhere and that such conduct was not socially approved in a conservative Philadelphia suburb did not deter him.

Alice, however, had every intention of keeping her virtue, at least for another six years until she was thirty. Then, if she had not landed a man, she might reconsider. Therefore she had adroitly held Mr. Lorbeer off, treading the tightrope between submission and defiance until she got her license, and the principal of the Lowland Avenue School had also seen her practice work and had an opening for a third-grade teacher.

But the fact that he was no longer in a position to apply improper pressure had not discouraged Lorbeer. He still pursued her with phone calls, small gifts, and offers of dates. And though he was no longer her practice-teaching supervisor he was important enough in the school system so that she did not dare insult him openly.

"Certainly it will be interesting," said Stanko, but persisted in his implacable monotone: "I should still like to see this elementary school where Miss Wernecke teaches. Could I be shown around?"

Uncertain what to do with this request, Alice floundered. "I'm not sure—I suppose—oh, I know! The fourth-graders are putting on *Hansel and Gretel* tomorrow afternoon. Why don't you bring him around then? I'll speak to our principal."

It was a dirty trick to play on Inez Rogell, who taught one of the two fourth-grade sections, but at that moment it was the best that Alice could think of.

LATER after Byron Matthews had walked home, she sprang the news of the impending visitation on Inez. The roommate proved a brick. After a quiet case of hysterics she said sure, she would make all the arrangements. Inez was a stocky girl a decade older than Alice with an unbeautiful face, thick eyeglasses, and all the sex-appeal of a lawn-mower. She had, Alice knew, given up all hope of marriage many years before. Nevertheless her virtue was still intact for want of takers. Alice sometimes reflected that if only Mr. Lorbeer would come slavering after Inez instead of her, everybody would be happy. Or at least happier.

Because of Inez's age and ugliness, Alice did not have to worry about competition from Inez for her own men. On the other hand, it put Alice in the position where she felt obligated to try to get dates for Inez from time to time, and these never turned out well.

Inez concluded: "But if that Warren boy has another fit, don't say I didn't

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warn you. Now, let's get some sleep."

The following afternoon Alice was waiting when Matthews showed up ten minutes late in the little black State Department sedan with Stanko beside him. Matthews explained:

"Sorry, couldn't find the place. Where do we go now?"

Alice led them to the auditorium, noticing that when in more of a hurry than his short legs could manage, Stanko put his knuckles to the ground and used his arms as crutches.

The school auditorium was merely a big room with a stage at one side and several rows of folding chairs set along the floor. The first of these rows was now occupied by pupils of the fourth and adjacent grades, while the two and a half rows behind these were filled by the mothers of the fourth-graders. On the stage Father, in the person of a colored sixth-grader with a false blond beard affixed to his chin, was singing his complaint about hunger's being the poor man's curse, while to the right of the stage Inez bravely banged out Herr Humperdinck's mediocre music on the school's battered piano.

Alice led her guests in, Stanko swinging along on his knuckles like an orang-utan. Though they entered and sat down quietly in back, heads turned and there were gasps and whispers from the fourth-grade mothers. As the auditorium was only imperfectly darkened, those on the stage could see the new arrivals too. The song about the poor man's curse died away in a squeak as Father stood goggling, ignoring the backstage prompting of Miss Pasquale, who taught the other fourth-grade section. Then Father sidled towards the wings where he engaged in a colloquy with the unseen Miss Pasquale. His stage-whisper wafted out into the auditorium:

"I'm scared. Can't sing with him lookin' at me."

Alice breathed an "Oh, dear!" Mr. Matthews looked serious. As Father tried to push his way offstage, Miss Pasquale's arm came out and grabbed him, and Miss Pasquale was heard to make some threat about beating his head in that would certainly not be found in any of the official manuals on child guidance. Meanwhile the girl playing Mother caught his coat from behind in an effort to pull him back to the center of the stage.

STANKO sat taking all this in with his great jewel-like eyes. As the efforts of Father to leave the stage and of Miss Pasquale to stop him became more gymnastic, Stanko asked in a low voice:

"Is something wrong?"

"You—ah—seem to have startled him a bit," murmured Alice.

Stanko rose to his stubby legs and his voice carried flatly: "Do not be alarmed; I am merely studying your tribal rites. Please go on."

The sound of the inhuman voice seemed to have more effect on Father than either Miss Pasquale's threats or her efforts at physical coercion. Father let himself be pulled and pushed back to the center of the stage, where he concluded his song in a tremulous voice. After that the opera limped along for another three-quarters of an hour without major mishap, save when the Witch became so conscious of Stanko's scrutiny that she missed her footing and tumbled off the stage.

At the end the shades were pulled up to let in the light. The mothers took a good look at Stanko and hurried off without stopping to exchange greetings and gossip. Miss Pasquale and Inez Rogell and Miss Halloran, the principal, came forward to meet the visitor, though each of the three ladies seemed anxious to let the others experience this honor first.

When they finally got away, Alice caught up her coat to show Stanko and Matthews out. When they got outside Mr. Matthews wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, though it was a cool October day, and suggested that they

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stop at the nearest drug store for a cup of coffee. At the drug store he said, even more hesitantly than when he had suggested a date the night before:

"Alice, Kstāho has another—uh—proposal to make."

"Yes?" said Alice with a sinking feeling.

"Yes," said Stanko. "I have been inquiring into your social customs, particularly that custom of dating which your young people practice. When I pressed Mr. Matthews for an example he admitted that he intended to undertake this rite with you, Miss Wernecke."

Alice glanced at Matthews, whose face bore much too unhappy, embarrassed, and self-conscious a look for even a fledgling diplomat.

Stanko continued: "So it seemed to me that the most instructive thing that you could do would be to embark upon one of these dates with me along as an observer. You would do all the things and go all the places that you would if I were not there; just pretend that I do not exist."

"Why I never—" Alice began with heat, but Matthews gently grasped her wrist.

"Please, Alice," he said. "It's important."

"Oh, all right," she said. After all a date with Byron Matthews, even with this bizarre chaperonage, would probably prove more fun than one with John or Edward.

"How about a movie?" said Matthews, and so it was arranged.

When Alice got home the telephone rang, and there was Byron Matthews on the line. He said:

"I'm awfully sorry about this, Alice—"

"Sorry about what?"

"Why, tonight. I mean, uh, not that I don't want to take you out—"

"I wondered for a minute," she said.

"Well, uh, you see, under normal circumstances—but we have to play along with Stinky or it'll be bad not only for me but for the country and maybe the world as well. These Wolfians are really very proud and sensitive and emotional—"

"Those shell-less turtles high-strung?" cried Alice.

"Yes, believe it or not. They even commit suicide when they consider themselves insulted."

"Oh my goodness! That doesn't sound like the sort of people to send exploring the universe, when they may run up against any kind of treatment. . . ."

"That's true. Stanko told me they've lost three members of their group by suicide already. Before they landed on earth, that is. So you see . . . But we'll have a real date as soon as we can get out from under Stanko's eagle eye. See you tonight."

DURING the evening Alice coöperated as well as she could with Byron Matthews in the pretense that their chaperon was not there.

After the movie they stopped in at the same drug store where Stanko ate a banana split, Matthews had a root-beer soda, and Alice, mindful on the one hand of her shape and on the other of the necessity of getting a full night's sleep to be in condition for her monkey-cage the next day, confined herself to a small coke. In answer to her questions, Matthews told her something of the inner workings of the Department of State. She commented:

"When you explain it, it doesn't seem so mysterious or glamorous at all, but just one more government bureau all snarled up in its own red tape, like the Darbydale public school system. I always imagined State Department people as dashing about in striped pants and dodging spies, with brief-cases full of priceless papers under their arms."

He answered: "That's what many people think. But the striped pants are merely our working-clothes, like an elevator man's uniform. And for the last five years I've been chained to a desk in Washington filling out forms in sextuplicate and buying airplane tickets for

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V. I. P.'s, most of whom turn out to be just ordinary human beings with the usual percentage of stinkers." He took a final pull on his straw, so that it emitted a snoring sound as the last of the soda was sucked up. "But I expect more variety in the future. I've put in for transfer to the Foreign Service. Would you like something else? You might as well shoot the works. Uncle's paying for it."

"I think I'll have mercy on the taxpayers," said Alice, mentally adding, and on my waist-line.

When Matthews bid her good-night they shook hands. Stanko, watching, said:

"From what I have read and seen in your motion pictures, I understand that young people on dates in this country usually kiss before parting."

"Uk?" said Matthews.

"Well, do they not?"

"Sometimes," said Alice.

"And sometimes they do other things as well," said Matthews. "But as this custom you refer to is an—uh—somewhat sentimental rite, I don't think this would be an appropriate time. . . ."

In the darkness Alice could not see if Matthews were blushing, but he certainly sounded as if he were. Stanko said:

"Nevertheless I wish that you would kindly do so. My observations will not be complete otherwise. Pretend that I am not here."

Matthews swore under his breath, then held out his arms. "Might as well do it up brown."

Alice suppressed a giggle and went into the clinch. She had been kissed often enough to know that unless the other party had a bad breath, a broken tooth, or a full beard, the difference between one kiss and another is not astronomical. Nevertheless she was pleased to find that Byron Matthews did a smooth job, as a man of his age and presumable experience certainly should. Before they broke he whispered:

"As soon as I can get rid of Stinker I'll be around for more!"

Alice went into her apartment thoughtfully. The last word had been somewhat ambiguous. Perhaps Stanko's chaperonage had not been an altogether bad idea. If Byron Matthews's notions of "more" were like those of Mr. Lorbeer, the extra-terrestrial's presence had at least saved the date from degenerating into a wrestling-match, as sometimes happened on dates with young men whose hands seemed to possess an uncontrollable exploratory urge.

In the case of Matthews she was not even sure of how strong her defenses were against one whom she found so attractive. She fortified her resolution by remembering her mother's last warning:

"Ach, Alice, remember yet, any time you think you don't vant a good girl to be, you never gatch a man by giving him free vot he vill marry you to get!"

ALICE WERNECKE was correcting papers in her apartment the following afternoon when the telephone rang. Her heart leaped at Byron Matthews's voice, then sank as she took in his graveyard tones.

"Alice," he said, "you know what?"

"What?"

"Stinko—pardon me, Cultural Representative Kstãho—wants a date with you!"

"You mean like last night?"

"No! He wants it all by himself. I'm not even to come along as chaperone."

"Oh-oh!" said Alice.

"Exactly, oh-oh."

"What's the big idea?"

"He has a line of double-talk about how to understand our cultural pattern he has to engage in our activities as much as the difference of species permits."

"I hope the difference doesn't permit too much. What sort of date has he in mind?"

"He's hell-bent to take you to a football game; heard the men at the Greers' party talking about it. I suppose I can use my State Department connections

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to get you a pair of tickets to the Penn-Army game. . . ."

"I've got a better idea. Darbydale High plays Lansdowne High tomorrow. It won't be a very hot game, but he won't know the difference, and it'll be easy to get seats at, and I'd rather be stared at by a couple of hundred people than fifty thousand. Or maybe you could persuade him to stay at the Greers' and watch a good game on their TV?"

"No; I've tried that. He'll call for you at two-thirty tomorrow, then. Uh."

"Yes?"

"Damn it, I was all set to ask you out tonight myself, but I've got to get in a report. The Undersecretary's been putting the heat on me."

"Oh," said Alice. "I'm sorry. But then I have papers to correct too."

Prompt and courteous, Stanko showed up in a taxi the following afternoon. After a trip to Lansdowne High School, marred only by a tendency of the driver to crane his head around to stare at Stanko when he should have been watching the road, they got out and trailed in with the crowd. The high-school bands were cutting up on the field, and they were hunting for seats when a familiar voice said:

"Hello, Alice!"

It was Mr. Lorbeer with a blanket over his arm and a pipe in his mouth, looking not at all like the leading lecher of the Delaware County public schools.

"Oh—ah," said Alice nervously, then pulled herself together: "Mr. Lorbeer, this is Mr. Stanko, of Wolf three hundred and something. Mr. Stanko, meet Mr. Lorbeer, who teaches science at Darbydale High."

"I've heard a lot of the Wolfians," said Mr. Lorbeer. "Have you become a football fan?"

"As I have not yet seen a game," said Stanko judiciously, "I cannot tell whether I shall acquire a fanatical devotion to the sport or not. Perhaps you would be so kind as to explain the rules?"

"Sure, sure," said Lorbeer, and drifted with Alice and Stanko to a vacant spot in the stands. They seated themselves.

For the next two hours Stanko and Lorbeer almost completely ignored Alice. They seemed to get on famously. Considering the identity of her swains Alice was just as glad, and tried to act as if she were sitting with them purely by accident.

Lorbeer not only explained the nuances of football, but even draped his blanket around Stanko's shoulders when the latter got cold. Lorbeer knew a lot of things that Alice did not and that interested Stanko.

"I," said Stanko, "tried that curious custom of breathing smoke once, and nearly choked to death. Tell me, how did the custom originate and what is its cultural or ritualistic significance?"

Lorbeer launched into an account of the peace-pipes of the North American Indians, the cigars of the Caribs, and the cigarettes of the Aztecs. Wolfians, thought Alice, were poor judges of human character.

When Lansdowne had beaten Darbydale 55-36, Mr. Lorbeer got up, reclaimed his blanket, and said: "This has been a most pleasant afternoon. I'll be seeing you, Alice."

He made the last statement with that emphasis that made Alice think that he rather than Stanko ought to be called a Wolfian.

Stanko crutched his way out to the curb where the same taxi had stood all through the game. The bill, thought Alice, must be fantastic, but then the government was probably paying it too. As Stanko stood back for Alice to get in, he said:

"I trust that I am not too precipitate in asking you for another date, Miss Wernecke, but I request that you accompany me to dinner at the Bellevue-Stratford this evening. Is that agreeable to you?"

NOW to dine and dance at the Bellevue-Stratford had been an ambition of Alice ever since she settled in the Philadelphia neighborhood. Unfortunately neither John nor Edward nor any

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of the occasionals could afford it, and while Mr. Lorbeer would have taken her, she did not wish to date him under any circumstances. On the other hand she would have preferred never going near the hotel to going with Stanko. But in view of what Byron Matthews had said, she did not quite dare turn him down flat. . . .

"I can't tell you right now," she temporized. "I have a half-way date this evening already."

"Oh?"

"Y-yes. Let me go home and check up—I'd have to get dressed anyway—and then call me."

As soon as she got into her apartment she bolted for the telephone, causing Inez to say: "Here, what goes on?"

Ignoring her roommate Alice dialled the Swarthmore Inn and got Byron Matthews. She wailed:

"Byron, that mud-turtle of yours wants to take me out again tonight!"

"Hell!" roared Matthews. "I worked most of last night to get that report done so I could ask you out tonight myself—though I thought you'd probably be dated up in advance anyway."

"Then couldn't we just pretend—"

"No! Honey, you've got no idea how important this is. If Stinky wants anything short of physical indignities, go along with him as far as you decently can."

"Oh. Is that really true? About the importance, I mean. Or are you trying to get out of—"

"True!" came the blast of sound out of the receiver. "You're damned right it's true. These Wolfians act friendly and honest enough and maybe they're all right. But nobody has yet been to their damned planet to check up, see? And thy're at least as smart as we are. So it's absolutely vital to keep on the good side of them until we can find out what they *are* up to."

"You mean I'm a sort of key figure in interplanetary relations?"

"For the time being, yes. So put on a long dress and toddle off with Stanko. If he wants to be a big turtle-about-town, you help him be one."

"But am I safe? If you don't really know much about these creatures—"

"You'll be as safe as the Department can make you. You didn't notice you were followed by a couple of F.B.I. men all afternoon, did you?"

"N-no."

"All right then. If the Cultural Representative acts up, just yell."

She hung up with a sigh. Byron was evidently one of those exasperating males, incomprehensible to any normal woman, who would sacrifice even their women to some abstract ideal. Like that nonsense about "I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honor more."

Alice took a bath and made up. Inez caught her admiring her assets in the mirror and remarked sourly: "Yeah, you make a good appearance, especially without your clothes. But it's all wasted on your friend from the Galápagos."

Alice made a face at her roommate, repaired the damages thus done to her makeup, and slid into her second-best evening dress—she was saving the best one for a hoped-for formal date with Byron Matthews. At the appointed time Stanko showed up in the same taxi.

At the Bellevue, Alice moodily drank her cocktail and fiddled with her dinner. Being stared at was bad enough, but in addition she found Stanko, even with allowance for the difference of race, to be egregiously dull company. Despite his near-perfect English the extra-terrestrial seemed to have no sense of humor, no sparkle whatever; no visible motivation save an insatiable appetite for facts and statistics about the earth. When she tried to get him to talk about his home planet he answered her questions with curt one-word answers and returned to the attack. His slow monotone was maddening in its deliberation.

The only time she brightened was when he said: "I trust, Miss Wernecke, that you will not be affronted if I do not ask you to dance. I am not familiar with the sport, and it is moreover one to which my form is not well suited."

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"That's all right," she said heartily.

At ten o'clock Stanko looked at his wrist-watch and said: "I understand that this time the more conservative citizens among you are accustomed to return home to sleep. Is that correct?"

"Yes. Wait, Mr. Stanko, you have to pay your bill."

"So I do. Oh, *garcon!* I mean waiter! By the way, Miss Wernecke, I have heard of your custom of tipping. How much do you think I should give?"

ALICE made a rough guess and walked out with Stanko. In the taxi home the inquisition continued:

"Now, please explain the social significance of this custom of chewing the gum of the sapodilla tree. Though I have seen many performing the act, I note that neither you nor Mr. Matthews does it. Is it regulated by law, or what?"

Alice answered with half her mind, the other half silently urging the driver to get them home as soon as possible to rid her of this galactic bore. At the doorstep, however, Stanko said:

"Wait, Miss Wernecke. I have several things to say. To begin, I think we had better forgo your custom of kissing, which strikes me as most unsanitary. You do not mind?"

"Not in the least!"

"Well then, we now come to the question of our next date. I wondered what we could do tomorrow. Another dinner and dance, perhaps? One of those places of revelry called night-clubs?"

"No, Mr. Stanko, you can't. In Philadelphia all the places of revelry are closed on Sunday."

"Then how about the theater? It impresses me as a highly developed art-form—"

"They're closed too."

"Another motion-picture?"

"I've seen all the good ones."

"Then how about doing something in the afternoon? For instance, we might pay a visit to the zoölogical gardens. I have already been there, but I should not mind repeating my visit."

Alice shook her head grimly. "The animals bother my allergies, and I see enough monkeys every day in my class."

"That is unfortunate. Perhaps we could have a swimming party. We" (here he used a word from his own language, full of nasal vowels and gutteral consonants) "are good swimmers."

"In October? That's much too cold for us mere humans, Mr. Stanko. All the pools will be drained."

Alice suspected that some heated indoor pools might be open in the Philadelphia area, but had no intention of giving him this opening by suggesting it. Interplanetary crisis or not, she was not going out with the Cultural Representative again as long as she could think up excuses.

"I see," he said, his alien form drooping a little as if with sadness, though his flat voice betrayed no emotion. "We seem to be at an impasse. Tell me, would you consider the term 'a few' as including the number 'two'?"

"What an odd question! I suppose you could, though 'few' doesn't have any definite limits."

"Well then, it could be said that I have had a few dates with you. We can count Thursday night's episode as half a date, I think. I had intended to have one more before putting my proposal to you—"

"What proposal?" said Alice, alarm running up her spine.

"—my proposal to you, but since that seems impractical I will stretch a point and proceed. Mr. and Mrs. Greer were kind enough to tell me much about your custom of marriage. They explained that it is common for a male of your nationality, after he has had a few dates with a female, if he likes her well enough to wish to live with her, to ask her to marry him. As I have now qualified, I ask you to marry me."

SPEECHLESS, Alice stood staring, her throat refusing to make a sound for several seconds while the enormity of the proposal sank in. At last she squeaked:

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"Did you say m-marry?"

"Yes. I assure you that I am not always so devoted to my work as during my present investigation, when I must make every minute count. Back on Wolf 359-I you will find me an agreeable and not an exacting companion, and you shall enjoy such comforts and luxuries as you are accustomed to on your own world."

"But—b-but—Stanko, that's im-*possible!*"

"What is impossible about it? Marriage, as I understand it, is a matter of the couple's agreeing before a magistrate to live together in mutual affection and support for the rest of their lives. What prevents us from doing that?"

"It wouldn't be legal, you not being a human being. . . ."

"If your magistrates raise legal objections, the captain of our ship can devise the necessary contractual ceremony."

"Oh, no. Oh, no. Stanko, you don't understand."

"And what do I fail to comprehend?"

"There's much more to marriage than that."

"Really? Please explain."

Alice found herself tongue-tied.

"Well? I await your reply, Miss Wernecke."

Alice, never having reared children of her own or taught adolescents, had not developed a technique for answering such questions. All that she could say was:

"Didn't the Greers ever say anything about the facts of life?"

"They have explained a great deal, but I do not know if that includes the facts that you have in mind."

"You know, about the bees and the flowers."

Stanko gave the Wolfian equivalent of a sigh. "Miss Wernecke, I am striving to follow you, but am admittedly finding it difficult. Why should the Greers lecture me on insects or plants? Neither is an entomologist or a botanist."

Alice, feeling her face flaming in the dark, had no choice but to explain in plain words what she meant. When she finished there was a little silence. Then Stanko said:

"I see. Miss Wernecke, I have committed a grave social error, and hope that you will accept my assurances that it was through ignorance and not through intent. By pure chance nobody had explained to me the connection between marriage and the reproductive process to which you allude. On Wolf 359-I things are managed differently. A male there fertilizes a female only once in his life. After that he is assigned to another female to serve her in his time off from work. Our females are much larger than the males—about the size of one of your elephants—and of quite a different exterior form, so that they find it difficult to move about. They are also less numerous, so that each female has sixteen to twenty males assigned to her. And I had erroneously equated this latter relationship to your marriage."

"But what made you think—" began Alice in a small voice, close to tears.

"That you would find the relationship agreeable? I fear that I was judging by the reactions of my own kind. This contretemps goes back to when my fellow-explorers were discussing the matter, shortly after we had alighted, and I in a jesting way spoke of bringing an earthly female back home with me. Considering that you are hardly larger than I, the prospect looked inviting. You could hardly mistreat me as my ex-wife, from whom I was divorced so that I could come on this expedition, treated all her husbands."

Alice could hardly imagine Stanko's joking about anything, but let that pass. He continued:

"The others kidded me (I believe you say) about this rash boast until I swore that I would in fact carry it out. Now that I see that I have failed and have been humiliated in your eyes, my own, and those of my companions, there is nothing for me to do but die. I shall sit down right here and will myself to death."

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"Oh!" cried Alice. "Don't do that!"

"I am sorry, but there is no alternative. Rest assured that the process will take only an hour or two, and then the garbage-collectors will remove my corpse in the morning."

"But—" Alice stared helplessly into the darkness, then remembered Byron Matthew's promise of surveillance. She called: "Help! F. B. I.! Help!"

"Coming," said a voice. Footsteps pounded.

Three men approached. One was the taxi-driver, one a man whom she had vaguely noticed sitting near her at the Bellevue-Stratford, and the third was Byron Matthews.

IN A few strangled sentences Alice explained what had happened, pointing to Stanko, who had sat down with his back to the wall in a kind of yogi posture and seemed no longer conscious. Then, sobbing, she melted into Matthews's arms.

"Hell and damnation," he said, "does that guy have to get ahead of me in everything? I was going to propose to you too, after a few more dates to get decently acquainted."

"You were?"

"Yes. But now there's only one thing to do."

"What?"

"You must marry him, as he says."

Alice, hardly believing her ears, squirmed out of Matthews's arms.

"Byron Matthews are you crazy?"

"Wish I were. But we can't have this guy willing himself to death while we're responsible for him. It might cause God knows what kind of interplanetary crisis."

"Do you know what you're saying? To go to the other end of the universe with this — this —" She almost said "mud-turtle" but decided that such an epithet would only aggravate matters.

"I know," he said grimly. "I'd as lief marry him myself. But—"

"If you were going to propose to me—"

"Rub it in!" he said furiously. "I love you. Sure. I do. But I've also got my duty to my country and my world. Corny, isn't it?"

"You mean you'd actually want me to—"

"Who said 'want'? I'd rather will myself to death like him first. But I know what I've got to do when I've got to do it. Go on, tell him you will."

"Byron Matthews, I'll never see you again. I'll never speak to you again, for urging such a thing."

"Okay, you probably won't have the chance. I know how you feel. But go ahead. You've got to."

"Here" said the voice of Inez "what's all this? Is everything all right, Alice? I heard you call."

"Everything's not all right," said Alice, "but I don't know what you can do about it. Inez, this is Mr. Matthews of the State Department and a couple of gentlemen from the F.B.I. Miss Rogell. You know Mr. Stanko."

"F.B.I.?" said Inez, the light on the front porch of the little apartment-house gleaming upon her glasses. "What on earth is this? And what's wrong with Mr. Stanko? Has he a stomach-ache?"

Alice explained.

"Oh," said Inez. "Let me think. Mr. Stanko!"

"Yes?" said the Wolfian.

"As far as you're concerned, would you say Miss Wernecke and I were about equally attractive?"

"I should say you were. Perhaps you have a slight advantage, since you look a little more like a female Wolfian."

"Then it doesn't matter which human female you take back with you, does it?"

"No, though naturally some would prove more congenial companions than others. That however, is something that could only be determined by trial. What have you in mind?"

"Why not take me instead of Alice?"

Alice gasped. "Now you're crazy, Inez. I can't let you sacrifice yourself for me."

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"I'm not. I'm just a typical old-maid schoolteacher and I know it as well as you do. Whereas if I go with Stanko I'll be the first woman on Wolf 359-I and have all sorts of interesting experiences. Maybe I'll revolutionize their educational system. Well, how about it, Stanky?"

"I accept your offer with pleasure," said Stanko.

"But Inez—" began Alice.

"But nothing. I'm doing this because I want to, and I'm a free agent. Drop around tomorrow and we'll make the arrangements, Stank."

"Thank you, I will." Stanko got up and began to hobble towards the taxi.

"Alice—" said Matthews reaching.

"Go away!" she said, trying to keep down another spate of tears. "I still never want to see you again, after you tried to get me to—to—"

"But I still love you—"

"And I still hate you!"

Matthews's footsteps receded on the walk as he followed Stanko and the F.B.I. men.

"Seems to me," said Inez, "that when you get a chance at a good man like Byron you're a fool not to grab him. If I were in your place—"

"Oh shut up!" said Alice. The tears were coming freely now.

"By the way, old Lascivious Lorbeer called. He's got a pair of tickets for a concert next Friday night—"

"Oh!" said Alice.

The vision of life without Byron Matthews suddenly filled her mind—bossing her roomfull of brats, holding off Lorbeer, tolerating the insipid John and the feckless Edward grabbing at invitations to parties like the Greers' in hopes of meeting something worth playing up to. . . .

"Byron!" she called.

He came back on the run. Inez tactfully went back inside. When the clinch and the reconciliation had been executed and the vows had been exchanged, he said:

"I haven't had a chance to tell you, but my transfer to the Foreign Service just came through this morning, with a promotion.

"How splendid! I don't care where they send you; I'll go with you to the ends of the world."

"Swell! That's the kind of wife a State man needs."

"Only I hope never to see Stanko or any other Wolfians again."

"I'm not so sure. We're setting up a new Extra-terrestrial Division in the Foreign Service, and I'm scheduled to be First Secretary of our new embassy on Wolf 359-I as soon as it's . . . Hey!"

He quickly made as if to catch Alice's arms.

"No, I'm not going to faint," said Alice. "It was just the shock. But I'll manage. After all, Byron darling, you do have one advantage over Stanko don't you?"

THE LONG VIEW

A Novel by FLETCHER PRATT

Man ascends an ever steepening spiral towards the stars . . . life grows swifter and more sophisticated . . . but does it grow better? Here is a future world ruled by a scientific council which is prey to its own inner jealousies and rivalries and torn apart by bitter factional disputes like any other human group. An entrancing glimpse behind the veil of the future in one of the most brilliant novels to come from the versatile typewriter of Fletcher Pratt.

COMING NEXT MONTH!

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Operation Bats

Supersonic Squeaks and Incendiary Gizmos!

By LEWIS ISLAND

DURING World War II a plan was actually considered to liberate thousands of bats over an enemy city. They would flutter down from our bombers and find shelter, as bats do, in attics, steeples, sheds—any building chink they could crawl into. The payoff was that each innocent little critter would have an incendiary gizmo attached to him, with all of them timed to cut loose at the same time! With hundreds of mysterious fires breaking out at once, the city would go up in flames, be panic-stricken and disorganized . . . would have—ah—bats in its belfries, as it were.

Long before man developed radar, the bat had its own system of emitting supersonic squeaks, too highly pitched to be audible to the human ear, and guiding its flight by the echoes. Even in a pitch-dark room criss-crossed with fine wires, the bat's "radar" functions so perfectly that it can fly hell-for-leather around the room without colliding with a wire. We doubt that a man-made bat-sized missile, equipped with every kind of detection device and remote control, could do as well: such maneuvers require the split-second precision of a self-guided missile.

LEONARD DUBKIN, the naturalist, in his latest book, "The White Lady," tells the true story of his tame albino bat who amuses herself by *flying through the whirling blades of an electric fan!* Not only that, but when the speed of the fan is raised from 800 revolutions per minute to 1200, the little "white lady" may dash at the fan . . . but at the last second she zoo-o-oms up and over it!

H'm . . . 800 r.p.m. boils down to *13 per second!* Would that some jackass Sunday drivers, weaving in and out of heavy traffic, had such nice judgment of comparative speeds. . . .

Even so, what does she do with her wings when she zips through that fan? Bats have sizable wing-spreads—about three times the length of the body. She must fold them around her and go through like a V-2—or like an egg. Ever try that?

We once did . . . *blah!*

STRIPPED of those wings, the "white lady" *would* be about the size of an egg—or a mouse. Which reminds us—speaking of missiles and mice—the Holt Radium Institute in England has proven that large doses of alcohol given to mice just before exposing them to lethal radiation saves many of them from death! So when the air-raid siren sounds, break out the Scotch . . . though it may not work with men, of course. A rabbit can survive a dose of morphine that would kill a man. A snail shrugs off enough strychnine to kill a man. Whether or not the Scotch would protect us from A-bomb radiation would seem to depend on the familiar question:

Are we a man or a mouse?

Looking around us at the condition of the world today, we're tempted to say that we're all—

Bats! ● ● ●

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THE CROOK IN TIME

A Novelet by R. J. McGREGOR

Harry and Gloomy, licensed hoods, had botched a slight case of murder . . . and had to pay their fines with loot from Limbo!

All around them shrill voices started yelling

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FOREWORD

DURING JULY there were censored news hints of time clocks: ("Just wind one up, set it, hang on, punch the getaway stud—and off you flash to anytime.") Time clocks, however, were ticking trifles compared to top secret NRR (Narco Radio Rehabilitation). This was a new micro-brainwave modulation capable of creating consciences in criminals and politicians and such. In short, it could control sin.

The trouble all started when an overzealous soul, (female) foreseeing the Millennium, purloined an experimental NRR portable unit, conceived the Era of Sweetness and Light, and on August 10th sneaked up and gave the unsuspecting Congress, Cabinet and President the full treatment. Her gadget exploded before she had treated all the top brass. But those already affected had become instantly and utterly—honest.

In the resulting crisis Organized Crime rallied. Crime Ambassador Marvin "Loophole" Seltzer, also President of International Murder, Inc., shouted to a frightened huddle of police commissioners that night: "My organization will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the law, as always. Together we shall fight this Sweetness menace to shining victory—"

But despite such good intentions, midnight August 15th was named by the gimmicked government as the inception hour of SWEETNESS AND LIGHT.

This was proclaimed throughout the land. The news went shivering down the freedom line till even registered subway dips frantically stockpiled wallets and such baubles in in round-th-clock shifts ere came the deluge. It even filtered through the cold iron bars of prisons and there was unrest in guest and guardian alike. . . .

I

UP THE river on Death Row two shave-headed unfortunates sat in their cell. Their double execution was set for five a.m. the next day, August 13th. And the little green door in the hotseat housing was right over there.

Harry-The-Heater clutched the bars, resenting the unfairness of it all. His pal, Gloomy-The-Slug, just sulked in silence.

As Harry saw it, this whole thing was wrong. Weren't Crime and International Murder honorable and necessary parts of world government? They were. And when these last two politicians—Jones and Kash—had got out of line, hadn't the rubout order passed right down from national party headquarters to Harry's own Local 602 of IM? It had.

And hadn't he acted on orders double-checked through the police? Of course. And wasn't he a salaried heater-man, due to retire on pension in sixteen years? He most certainly was.

He considered the finer points of his profession. "ALWAYS LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING," was the motto.

He couldn't help but compare a hot-seat frying to that hysterically joyous way his victims had always died. He

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still recalled the words in the Heater's manual:

"FOCUS HEATER ON FINGERED CITIZEN. BATHE CITIZEN FIRST WITH TICKLER RAY (first notch) UNTIL CITIZEN CHUCKLES, LAUGHS, ROARS, AND FINALLY WHEN CITIZEN ROLLS ON FLOOR HOLDING HIS SIDES IN GASPING UNCONTROLLABLE LAUGHTER, AND WHEN TEARS OF JOY DIM HIS VISION—BLAST HIM FULL POWER UNTIL HE IS VISUALLY FADED AWAY AND HIS MIRTH IS SILENCED."

Harry envied his victims more than ever now.

But there were more galling factors.

Two weeks ago, before he and Gloomy had loused up, the two of them had got in a crap game. And Gloomy had won from Harry his most precious possession—that gorgeous blonde creature, Mabel-The-Moll, whom Harry had rightfully obtained from the Local 602 moll-library on a year's rental. Now Harry not only had to pay the girl's rental, but he also had to endure Gloomy's enjoyment of her. And you could check out only one moll at a time. And Mabel, that fickle wench, didn't seem to mind the switch at all. And worst of all, Harry was sure that Gloomy's dice had been *loaded*—a crime punishable by death.

Trouble with Gloomy was he had no conscience!

And that dirty, doublecrossing union, 602. Just because Harry had forgot to pay his dues and hadn't known the police password . . .

"Anybody can forget," he said aloud.

"Shaddup," said Gloomy. "With this Sweetness coming we're better off dead anyway."

"Yeah, but those razor-happy guards. Shaving our heads like that, Gloomy. With hair I'm a fairly good looking guy. But now—our pictures in the papers tomorrow. Like this."

"You'll never notice the difference, pal."

"And that Warden!" cried Harry, pacing the floor. "Giving us twin billing like a pair of second raters. I always hoped—if I loused up like this—to make headlines alone; solo star in my own last show."

"Can it, dope," said Gloomy. "Here comes our mouthpiece."

The two clients watched the Warden approach squiring one gaudily platinumed and slightly shopworn, but as yet in dandy standing with the bar association, mouthpiece known in 602 circles as Suzie-The-Hacksaw.

* * *

"THEN, Warden," said Suzie as she leaned hippily on their bars, "it's all fixed?"

"All but the final details," smiled the fatherly Warden.

She handed the man the final details, a fat wad of bills.

He patted her posterior thoughtfully. "Bring those cell keys to my quarters," he reminded her. "I'll be there."

"Mix some drinks," Suzie called as he dwindled down the last mile. Then she keyed into the cell. "Now listen you baldheaded bums," she began. "I went to a lot of trouble for you guys and I expect to be paid. So don't die."

She took two tiny wrist watches from her purse and strapped one on each prisoner's wrist. Then she sat back and crossed her silken knees.

"You boys are guinea pigs," she told them. "You're both in disgrace with 602. You, Gloomy." She shook her head. "You rubbed out the *wrong Jones*. No appeal. And you, Harry. You're in so deep Governor Blair refused your stay of execution. For these reasons:" She took an official document from her purse and read.

"1—*Failure* to give the password to the posted cop after the rubout. 2—*Inexcusable Unpreparedness;* your pulse-heater was empty after the job, leaving you unarmed. 3—*Being in arrears* with your 602 dues, which explains why you didn't know the police password."

Harry hung his head, thinking. Gov-

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ernor Blair had got elected only because IM and 602 had rubbed out the man's pollitical opponents. And this was Blair's gratitude.

"So," said Suzie, "I had to gimmick the Warden. If you're missing tomorrow your execution will be faked. But the Warden has his scruples. If you're here—you fry."

"Fair enough," said Harry. "Let's scram."

Gloomy sat there crackling his knuckles. "Don't get excited, Harry," he growled. "Local 602 gives away no favors."

"Don't be ridiculous," Suzie snapped. "There's a chance you boys will come out of this experiment alive. If there wasn't, I wouldn't bother. Because you both owe me my mouthpiece fees. Now this is it," she said. "You boys are familiar with those new time clocks we stole from the Army. Well, those watches you're wearing are an improvement—they go future plus backward. Anytime. Only they've never been tested. So IM is giving you a fighting chance. Because IM is scared of the future. The government claims its new NRR gadget guarantees no more crime. Which means 602 and IM is finished.

"Now, if you get back alive, you'll owe the usual fines to 602. Plus my fees. You'll need money. Your job is to go any length into the future. If possible, commit a crime, a robbery big enough to pay your debts. This will not only clear you; it will give us all something to live for.

"You bring back the loot in time. Bring it back to the night of August 10th. That was your bad night, boys. That night your dues were payable at the seven p.m. meeting, Harry. And between eight and nine that night you both got in trouble.

"So *this* time around, you pay up, Harry. And you, Gloomy. Don't rub out the wrong Jones. Of course this is confusing. And if it's impossible, then you'll fry as scheduled. IM must know these things.

"Now," she smiled, lighting a cigarette and blowing a smoke ring," so far it's too easy. IM wants to know other things about time travel. There's a theory that if you travel from today to next week and back to yesterday—you'll be double in yesterday. If so, one of you would be real; the other would have to be rubbed out.

"There's another theory that if you travel ahead from today and get killed in the future—then your yesterday's self may keep on living beyond the future time you died. Because you may be two separate selves. Maybe you'll get lost in time. Maybe you'll be grabbed by future cops, if there are future cops. Maybe there is no future.

A Touch of Laughter

WE MAY have a perverted sense of humor, as some of our kindlier readers have suggested, but we think, and will defend our position to the death, that THE CROOK IN TIME is one of the funniest stories we've ever come across. Humor in science fiction is all too rare, and your letters have clamored for it. We have dutifully bought every good humorous story submitted. Along with MAJOR VENTURE and THE GUIDED MAN, this story stands close to the top in our book.

R. J. McGregor is an Arizona newspaper man. His first sale to us was SUCH AN ANGEL, his next the gem-like PERFECT GENTLEMAN. This is very different from the first two, but a remarkable performance of its own.

—*The Editor*

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"And most of all, IM wants to know if a citizen can be tailed through time—"

"Oh, oh," said Gloomy. "Here it comes."

Suzie nodded. "We want *all* the answers and this way we'll get them. Torso-The-Terrible has volunteered to try to tail you."

"That dirty, musclebound slob," said Gloomy.

"With," continued Suzie, "orders to blast you any time he can find you. He'll be armed. You won't."

"Good old 602," said Harry.

"Don't be bitter," Suzie said. "This is scientific research. And the whole future of IM depends on you boys. Your job is to stay alive and bring back the right answers and pay your debts. If you make it, we'll have Limpy-The-Fixit alter your patterns and we'll reinstate you and change your names." She stood up, dangling her purse. "That's it. And let this execution be a lesson to you and from now on avoid August 13th."

She went out and clashed the gate and ankled toward the Warden's.

The two volunteers eyed each other.

"It's lousy," said Gloomy.

"I think we can do it," Harry said. "Only in case we don't, tell me: Did you win my Mabel with honest craps?"

"If," said Gloomy, "I had a blaster here, I'd burn you for that crack. Without a tickler."

Harry shrugged. He set his watch ahead. "I'll go forty years future."

"In that case," Gloomy said, "I'll try twenty future." Gloomy gave one of his rare smiles. "Torso can only tail one of us at a time. And he's always resented your breathing, Harry. Guess which of us he'll chase first?"

Gloomy fingered his watch and got vaporous and was gone.

* * *

HARRY waited five minutes. Then he thumbed the getaway stud on his own watch. He saw the days and nights flicker in a fast shuffle. He felt the future air wheezing as his thin body boosted it aside. He eyed his watch dial: 37, 38, 39 years—40. Wham! Something kicked him viciously in the rear and he whirled.

That green plastic chair had tried to share space-time with his backside and the chair had won hands down.

He patted his hurt part and cased the joint. This was still his cell, but with improvements. No gate, no bars.

Then he saw her. Rising politely out of her chair. At first he thought she was Mabel-The-Moll, due to certain similarities.

"Ulp!" he said. "I—just—dropped—in." He swallowed hard.

"Why," she said in a sing-song voice, "I didn't know men ever came in here."

He could understand that, if the joint was still guarded.

"You," he said. "Aren't you cold?"

"Should I be?"

"No," Harry gasped, "clothes at all—"

"But why should I wear clothes in summer if I don't like them?"

Now there was a good question. Harry eyed her. He had never liked muscular molls like this one. And this Amazon towered over him a good six inches. She wasn't exactly flatchested, still— And that mustache on her baby face could stand some barbering.

"This is no doubt," he said, "the molls' Big House?"

"Big . . . House?" She seemed puzzled.

"Prison."

"Silly man. This is the government bean farm. And I work here."

"You mean," he speculated, "—*nut* farm? You have seen the little green men?"

"Why, yes," she smiled. "Those cute little lizard men."

He turned away and shut his eyes. He took a deep breath and got a grip on himself.

"I," he announced, "am a man from Mars."

"Really?" She seemed delighted. "I've

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been there. But I had an allergy to those squishy *thwark* plants and—"

"Fine," said Harry, hoping the white-coated attendant would come. Her flexing muscles were between him and the exit.

"Sit down," she suggested. "I'll brew some bean tea and we can talk."

"I'm not much of a talker."

"Well," she sighed, "I can't think of anything else we could do. Because I don't work this afternoon and everybody else is gone to the beach. And I really haven't enough beans to—"

"I," said Harry, "will go get you some beans."

So far he was admiring his control. He had not so much as blushed or howled for help. Maybe he was too scared. He took a couple of tentative tiptoes toward the open exit. Politely she stepped back and let him reach the last mile. He broke into a sweat and a very fast run. He knew the way out of this joint. If only some guy didn't flop a butterfly net over his head.

* * *

AS HARRY bolted down the too-familiar corridors and down the front steps and the drive and through the open, unguarded gate, he was aware of his conspicuous zebra suit and his shaven head. This worried him. Till he saw the nice old lady. She was at the curb out front, getting aboard a dream-design jet copter.

"Hey," he hollered, running up.

The old lady had a waxed and polished bald head. With genteel, concentric target circles of jade-green decorating her scalp. She stood there smiling beside the barefooted cabbie.

"Get me," Harry gasped, "outa this place."

The old lady pointed her walking cane at him and squeezed a bulb at the end. The small water jet squirted his face.

"Isn't that funny?" she asked.

"Very," said Harry.

"You want to come along, young man? I'm going to the amusement beach." She jumped into the copter.

"Anywhere," Harry said and scrambled in after. The cabbie slammed the door and revved the rotor and they zenithed.

"They just," observed Harry, "let the crazy people roam around."

The old lady was counting some great number on her fingers and gazing sadly into her purse. She glanced at him, startled.

"The crazy people? Why, of course," she said. "Young man, where are you from, anyway?"

"Mars, Ma'am."

"That's what I thought." She clucked her tongue. "And you mean to say they still have *insane asylums* on Mars, young man?"

"Yes," he said weakly.

"Well not here. Two years ago we adopted the Majority Rule Amendment. You see, they discovered that only about ten per cent of all people were sane, anyway. And those locked up in asylums—like I was—didn't like it much. So now the insane ninety per cent are running around having fun and the sane ten per cent are locked up. It's much more democratic that way." She looked at him critically. "Do you think you're normal, young man?"

"Naturally."

She seemed relieved.

"Then you're all right," she smiled. "Because only an egomaniac could possibly belief himself normal. You'll do, young man. You'll do."

She reached over and plucked at his sleeve and then she opened her purse and yanked out a fat, blinking green frog by a kicking leg.

"This," she confided, "is my husband George. He made himself over into a frog. Wasn't that clever of George?" She leaned over and dangled the frustrated frog in Harry's face. "You see, George and I love to travel. And this way, with him hiding in my purse, we get by with just one fare. But last week George laid all these eggs in my purse.

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And I just know they're my children but I don't know what to do about it. I can't even count them. And George is mad at me and won't talk—"

She rambled on, apparently not caring whether he listened. He let her talk. He patted her hand now and then. He gawked earthward.

Big House, as he remembered, was forty miles up the river. But now it crowded the outskirts. The city had some real cloudbuster buildings now. With ribbon-like bridges spanning between and monster busses traveling half a mile up. He could see some remarkably big, wingless airships floating like fat ducks in the harbor far across town. And as they approached he saw the beaches thronged with tiny people. And finally he saw the red-and-gold honky-tonk of an amusement park hugging the beach. Even a ferris wheel.

"Back to normal," he sighed. "Pull a job and scram."

II

THE COPTER settled on the beach. While the old lady was paying off the cabbie Harry thanked her and wished husband George good luck and got lost in the crowd—or tried to. He almost ran into three guys building a sand castle. They were grown men, all wearing prison suits like his. He stopped and looked around. Half the folks had shaved heads. Nearby six old codgers were yacking around their sand pile, all stark-naked. Yet some of the men and women wore swim suits.

No kids around; at least no small ones. Maybe the little monsters had a separate beach. Nobody seemed to notice him so he sat down in the sand to size up his surroundings. He began ogling some of the bare, raving beauties and got lost in admiration. One redhead in particular—

But his natural interest in such things seemed disgustingly dimmed. A week, he thought, of that doped-up Big House hash had done this to him. Yet he noticed that *none* of the other men gawked.

Which was impossible.

He jumped up and ran, panicky. He rounded a building and bumped smack into a tall, alluring young nude thing, about twenty-two. A type just born to wow 'em at the follies. He felt her strong muscles lifting him and dusting him off like a small child. At least this one had no mustache.

"Did I," she asked, "hurt you?" She seemed really concerned.

This, he thought wildly, is how an old-time nudist, a pioneer in this field, would have reacted at getting shanghaied to a burlesque. Also, people who live on lakes never swim much. His eyes swam over her perfection. It did nothing to him. *Absolutely nothing.* In fact, he almost hadn't noticed.

"Goodbye," he howled. He ran. Find a heater quick and pull a job and beat it *out* of here.

He dashed toward the amusement park. Then he stopped and froze. Torso-The-Terrible over there, grinning, coming around a knot of gobbling sunbathers. Torso, the huge man of rock-like face and iron muscles—so arranged by Limpy-The-Fixit and permission of 602. Torso who usually took on 602's difficult jobs. Torso brandishing a heater, kicking up geysers of sand, heading for Harry.

Harry considered burrowing deep into the sand like a doodle-bug and then Torso's giant strides had brought him up to point-blank range, grinning over the sights of his heater.

"Ah, Harry," he said, "it's good to see a normal man in this mad place. Even if it's you." Torso gave him a hungry smile.

"Well, sure. If you're not going to blast me."

"I didn't say I wouldn't blast you. That's my job," Torso thundered. "I just said it was good to see you." He flicked off the heater's safety stud. "Turn around, Harry."

Slowly he turned, obeying.

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"No point in taking you alive," Torso said conversationally. "And I'll get a fat reward for this."

Harry felt his knees getting jiggly.

"Torso," he said, "you can't blast me with all these people around."

The big man seemed to pause and consider. Finally he agreed:

"You're right. I'll just bash your brains out."

Harry could see the shadow of the man's arm raised, with the heater reversed in the huge hand, like a skull club. It started zinging down.

No use to run. Harry ducked and bent double and reached back between his legs. He grabbed Torso's feet and jerked hard. There was a great grunt and a crashing on the sand. And then all around shrill voices started screaming and yelling and about fifty lunatic women came piling on top of the two embattled m a l e s. And, somehow, through that wriggling, strangling mass of mostly bare femininity, Harry amazed himself by squirming out alive. Leaving Torso to whatever befell.

He dashed onto the midway.

NO GIRLIE shows, naturally.

A crowd around a pair of small lizards lecturing into microphones. A big red sign that said JOVIAN GIANTS and also mentioned beans.

"In," he gasped. "broad, sober daylight!"

He ached for the soothing sight of a cop. He *had* to find a sociable, sane soul and talk. Before he went stir-crazy. He jogged and stumbled on, putting all possible distance between himself and Torso, ducking in and out of doorways. Finally one forlorn barker stood fronting a gaudy concession, pleading for customers. This fellow took Harry's fancy. The man was about twenty. He had green-and-red hair, starched and spraying from his head in a fiery auriole. He wore patriotic polka-dotted pants and purple shoes and a howling yellow tie. But no shirt.

This, by now, seemed perfectly normal to Harry.

"Duplicators," cried the young man. "Marvelous Old Martian duplicators. Don't be lonesome; come in and talk to yourself. If you're small, let me double you. His voice broke. "*Please,* let me duplicate you, sir."

"Okay, sport," said Harry. "What's the pitch?"

"You," beamed the barker, "must be a very kind fellow, or you wouldn't bother. Nobody does anymore."

"I'm from Mars."

"Oh," said the barker. "With a striped jacket like that you must be from the polar caps."

Harry nodded. He stepped inside the red curtains. The place was full of mirrors and photos and no people. A hide-out.

"You're pale for a Martian. A polar mine worker, perhaps?"

"North pole," Harry explained. "Mining superintendent." He gazed around the walls. Hundreds of tri-plane photos of *identical* identical twins. His mind fumbled with and grasped the duplication concept. And he figured: *If I am two guys, I can maybe pull two jobs at once and scram quicker. I will humor this boy.*

"As a superintendent," the barker admired, "you must earn lots of beans."

"Beans again!" Harry stared at the fellow. "Look, buster, I'm new here. In my Mars mine we use money. You know—money?"

"Not," said the barker, "beans?"

"And I've never been duplicated, either."

"I suppose," said the barker, "the Mars made population is getting so large they don't need duplication any more. I'll explain Bean Economics." His eyes got that dreamy look and he sat down opposite Harry. "It all started long, long before Sweetness and Light. And before earth women killed all the Martian Old-Timers b e c a u s e they seemed ugly. Clear back in the Truman Administration when earth still had male Presidents. Inflation, they called it.

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Take haircuts, a typical ancient custom-compulsory: In 1950 haircuts cost a dollar. That year the first Martian Old-Timers swished over here in their saucers. Secretly they talked with President Truman and conceived the Earth HYP, or Hundred Year Plan.

"Truman," cried the barker, striking a pose, "is secure in ancient history as the man who gave us beans!" He leaped up excited. "Truman jacked up wages and prices. By 1960 haircuts cost forty dollars. By 1980 a haircut cost twelve thousand dollars. Taxes were slapped on all luxuries including food and children. Finally, only people with trucks could carry enough money to buy a haircut. The dollar was dead. This, of course, was part of the HYP. Then the government brought out the beans.

"A brave new concept," cried the barker jumping up and down. "The Martians had perfected a delicious white Lima bean with a perfect, purple cameo of George Washington grown on each side. This could not be counterfeited. The government, wisely planning ahead, had started Treasury Bean Patches all over. Oh, we still have our boom-and-bust cycles. But in depressions we simply plant a few beans and harvest them in the Fall. And in boom times we just eat our extra beans.

"You couldn't eat dollars, you know."

Harry listened and was not impressed. "I don't suppose," he said, "you people care much for junk like gold and diamonds?"

"Worthless," said the barker. "All those Martian mountains of solid diamond. And that equatorial gold belt around Venus just ruined earth's gold standard. Beans are the thing!"

Harry fumbled out a cigarette and fired it.

"Primitive," observed the barker. "You poor Martians. You still have external cigarettes. And I suppose you still have laws and crime and sex."

Harry clutched his chair arm.

"I don't remember sex," said the barker. "They say people used to go around—" He shuddered. "They say the sex urge—" He clamped his teeth shut, as if forcing away some dim evil memory. "You see, I'm only twenty-one. And sex has been unconstitutional for ten years. Our youngest children nowadays are eleven, if you've noticed. That's to cut down population."

"Clever," Harry admitted. "You people just passed a law."

"The Antisex, or 31st Amendment. They say a few criminals escaped NRR treatment in the old days and refused to cooperate. But then the psychologists discovered women's natural gift for minding men's business. So they made NRR female-compulsory, then issued them all NRR units. The women, especially spinsters, went around patriotically unsexing all the men.

"That did it, temporarily. Then this world NRR network started broadcasting, blanketing the entire earth with these antisex brainwaves, and I was a little boy when it all started, so—"

"Sex," said Harry, "was unscientific. It had to go." Then he realized he spoke from the heart. Those brainwave broadcastings had already reformed him! Trembling, he wondered what he'd ever seen in Mabel-The-Moll, and he yearned to rush back and find out.

He jumped up and went to the duplication machine. "Give me the works," he said and scrambled into the ENTER seat.

There was a prickly, buzzy sensation.

"Come out," called the barker.

Harry came out. He stared at the bald goop that stared back at him. Him! He took a step.

So did his duplicate.

He reached over and shook hands with himself, admiring his firm grips. He started to ask him: "You got a heater?" But so did his counterpart. Everything. Simultaneous, almost, as a mirror. He turned and walked to the smiling barker. Both of him. Harrys wondered which really was *him*. Then they got that typical uneasy feeling that *they* was looking and talking from two sets of three di-

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mensional eyes and a double-echo chamber with teeth.

* * *

"I'M GLAD if you enjoy it," said the barker. "You can look at the back of your necks and see yourselves as others see you."

Both Harry headed for a single chair and collided. He stood there growling at himselves. "You're already bored," noted the barker. "I'd better atomize one of you. Which one?"

"Him!" cried both Harry, pointing at each other. And then the idea came. "Suppose," they said, "Torso blasted one of us. The other would still be—yeah." There was a conference.

"Well, sure," said the barker. "If that's your only problem. I'll give you enough beans to buy a bucketful of diamonds. I can always harvest a few more. Here." He handed them three beans apiece. "But," he admonished, "you'll find that women don't like duplicated men. And that woman in the toy shop is the local Antisex Chairwoman, so—"

"Let us worry, pal," they said. They started out and paused at the entrance curtain. "You know something, pal," they said. "You're the only square guy we ever met in our life."

"That," smiled the barker, "is probably because I'm crazy."

They went out, furtive now. Fugitives unused to being hunted. Torso seemed to lurk in every shadow. And even if a heater was a pleasant kickoff—with the tickler—it seemed that Torso-The-Terrible was rightly named. They ducked into an alley and into the toy shop the barker had mentioned.

There were no small-kid playthings. But there were childish trinkets like big pails of Martian diamonds cut round into marbes. Oddles of assorted marble-games. Glittering in the unguarded window.

"Are they real?" Harrys asked, smiling.

The matron attendant did not smile. She was cunningly clad in suntan, highlighted only at waist by a narrow snakeskin belt, and with an odd, pencil-like ornament at the throat.

"Stupid men," she scowled. "Of course the diamonds are real." She flexed her muscles. "As for you two," she put her ham-like fists akimbo, "there's a custom against outside male duplicates. And you don't seem unsexed to me. And you won't be roaming the streets and acting so virile after I've NRRed you."

She grabbed the tiny, camera-lensed cylinder chained around her thick throat. She thumbed a stud and pointed it at the handiest Harry.

Z-z-z-z-z-z-z, it went. It left one Harry and a neutralized **thing** standing over there.

Never before had Harry slugged a female. But this, he felt, was it. Even as he bounced the haymaker off her lantern jaw, he apologized. As she collapsed he lugged her quivery, wilted charms behind a counter. He draped same with a rug. Then he saw his other self over there looking horrified.

"Oh, dear," sighed the NRRed Harry's high-pitched voice. It stood there like a loose-jointed mannikan, male as a powderpuff. "I *know* about you," it said. It pointed a "naughty-naughty" finger at Harry. "You're a criminal time-traveling and I simply *must do* something about you." Daintily it bent and unchained the fallen lady's NRR unit. "I'll just NRR you myself," it simpered.

Harry lept over the counter and landed a sleep-punch on its chin. And it lacked even the spirit to duck. It just swooned and *laid* there and snored.

"Ah," Harry sighed. He grabbed a bucket quart of Martian diamonds, price-tagged at three beans. He laid his three beans on the counter and beat it. He circled toward the shore, threading among the quaint population to where he hoped he could materialize back in home-time on clear, open beach. He fi-

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nally found a man, or a person neurotic enough to be dressed manwise, more or less. And he asked the man if he might like to exchange clothing.

The man giggled, "Why, yes. Of course." And he started disrobing.

So Harry shucked off the state's zebra costume and he climbed into the man's pants, shirt and shoes. He set his watch back forty years plus. To a certain August 10th, 6:45 p.m.

"I'll bet," he told the friendly chap who was now buttoning on his discarded striped costume, "you can't do this."

Harry started to thumb the getaway stud. He just stood there.

"Well," said his new friend. "Go ahead. Do something."

There was Torso over there.

Torso seemed very happy. He was sitsitting very close to a nude young thing of fabulously curved construction. A blonde. Quite cozy and contented, they were; their backs tanning in the westering sun, they did not note Harry's maneuvering.

Torso, Harry noticed, had numerous, yet surprisingly few abrasions on him, considering the circumstances of their last parting. Yet Torso *had* acquired some permanent marks, some still bleeding pleasantly, from those cat-clawing females. Torso was giving the blond girl a heavy patter of the old, old oil, which was a routine obviously alien and bewildering to her. She kept nodding her head and Torso kept ogling her good points. And Harry was envying the big man's amazing constitutional immunity to NRR. Meantime he picked up a suitable rock.

Now and again, as Harry angled in, behind them Torso would raise his eyes in the opposite direction to scan the entrance to the amusement park and toy with his blaster. Close now. Just one more step—ah! Harry swung his rock and fractured it behind the man's cauliflowered left ear.

The giant sighed and bled a little more and assumed the peaceful prone beside his startled blonde. And Harry hurriedly borrowed the heater. He damped out his bucket of diamonds' sparkle by filling the top of the pail with sand. Then he doublechecked his watch again.

"Say," cried the man who had exchanged clothing, "that was amazing. Real, actual male violence. And in my clothes, too!"

Harry couldn't waste time feeling sorry for his new friend. He felt too sorry for himself. Because he could stand there and stare and stare at that gorgeous nude blonde of Torso's. And it left him absolutely cold. Nothing. Shuddering he thumbed the getaway stud. . . .

* * *

Those same night-and-day flickerings; hot-and-cold singing air. He clung to his bucket and heater. Then daylight steadied. He looked at the watch. It was 6:45 p.m. now. August 10th. This was the day he and Gloomy had got in trouble. Only the trouble hadn't happened yet. Amid this normal plethora of pre-Sweetness bathers in seductively sane swim-suits, he pocketed Torso's heater and he lugged his bucket to the nearest public transportation strip and sat down to ride.

He was rich. He even had his preprison hair back. And best of all he was able to take a refreshing, healthy ogle at those numerous well-stacked and giggling dolls. He thought of Mabel-The-Moll and he smiled happily.

III

THE STRIP moved smoothly through the city. Harry sat between two gossipy, cheerful fat ladies. He held his precious bucket in his lap. And wouldn't 602 love to know this was possible! He thought it over. Here he was, a guy with a chance to live part of his life over again. And *this time* it would be different. Better. For instance: Right now it was seven p.m. and at the 602 meeting his dues due and overdue. So

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what? He was finished with all that. Except for a couple of scores that had to be settled first. Before—when this had happened—between eight and nine p.m. he and Gloomy had taken their 602 orders and blasted Senator Kash and the wrong Jones. "Why," he reasoned, "get in trouble again?" Instead, he'd play it smart.

* * *

HE STEPPED off the traveling strip downtown and he fenced a few sparklers at a certain place for cash. Then he bought a pair of handy cloth sacks, pocket-size, in which to carry his remaining gems. He caught a cab and gave the pilot Gloomy's address.

Mabel answered his knock.

"Gloomy's not home," she told him coldly. "He's got a 602 meeting. And then a rubout to do—a Jones. And then we're staying home tonight—alone!" She tried to slam the door on Harry's foot but he held firm.

That transparent negligee she was wearing. He had bought it. Now it broke his heart.

"You know I'm crazy about you, baby," he groaned. "I *rented* you. You're still mine. Because Gloomy won you with loaded dice."

She smiled. "So you guessed, huh?" She seemed to enjoy his anguish. "Okay, it was my idea. I gave him those shaded gallopers. And you know why? That 602 party last week. You drank beer. And next morning you had a breath, kid. And I just can't *stand* a man with halitosis. So I had Gloomy win me. He don't drink. Now scram!"

She reached through the door, lovely creature, and she swung a heavy book end at his head. He ducked and escaped and went away.

As Harry slouched down the street all seemed lost without her. What was the use of it all? But he stopped at a diner and had a rare steak and six coffees and he developed a slow burn. Which was not heartburn. So she was tricky. He knew a coupe of tricks to fix her. And as for Gloomy. His pal. The dirty poacher. Gloomy knew the 602 code, and the penalty for cheating. And if Gloomy figured his pal Harry was too soft hearted to square *this*, well—

He walked home, deep in thought. As he entered his front yard he took a good look at the other guy. That man there, coming out of Harry's house, was all wrong. Harry dived into the shrubbery and peered out for a better look. The man's footsteps came closer. Right past. Near enough to reach out and touch. And he got a closeup of the face, the body, that walk. And then the guy was walking away fast. Harry stood up covered with gooseflesh. Because the other guy was himself, too.

That other Harry, the one heading downtown to blast Senator Kash, was the *real* Harry, the *first* Harry. The *right* Harry who had never time travelled.

And he, the guy in the bushes, shouldn't even exist. The real Harry was living it straight. August 10th, this was. The way August 10th had really happened. And *he*—

It meant time travel was all wrong. Oh, he knew it worked. But you went future and you came back to your starting time okay. Only on arrival you were a different guy. So now there were also two Gloomys and two Torso-The-Terribles. And if any one of them got killed, then what?

He followed the real Harry. And they weren't like future duplicates, knowing everything together. Why, that other guy didn't even know his shadow was shadowing him in the flesh. And it was doubly weird knowing that his other self had to die in three days by frying. *Because it had already happened.* He shook his head. No. Suzie had brought a time watch to prison. And then—

He followed, shaking his head. The real Harry went straight to 602 headquarters and got his worksheet from the flossy stenog in the front office who didn't know or care about his dues being

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overdue. And he went directly across town to his victim's address. That same Senator Kash who had voted honestly—just once. There was himself going up the Senator's steps and ringing the door bell. Not knowing he had but one charge in his heater. Careless. Unaware that his dues were not paid. Thoughtless. And that same cop waiting, watching down the block. The cop, knowing about the kill in advance. Posted there on orders to double check everything afterward.

And he, the wrong Harry, skulking outside in shadow. Knowing the end.

* * *

THERE was the Senator at the door and the tiny shrill hum of the tickler ray. Kash's equally shrill, ecstatic laughter. Then the bright flash of the full blast. And Harry-The-Heater leaving another rubout. Coming out the door, down the steps. The cop walking casually to meet him with the check sheet in hand.

The same conversation as before:

"The Senator was a real giggler," the cop grinned. "It's okay by my sheet. Authorized by the national party chairman last week, it says here."

"He died laughing," the right Harry said.

Maybe the cop was lonesome. Or just talkative. "This'll be your last job," he said. "How do you IM guys feel about the future? I mean with the government all loused up with this NRR gimmick after the 15th."

The same pause as before. The real Harry shrugging. Thoughtful.

"Dunno. Guess we'll both be out of jobs. No more crime. Imagine. Sweetness and Light."

"It'll be a funny world." The cop chuckled without humor.

"I'll see you." Harry pocketing his empty heater. Careless. Starting to walk away. Forgetting the cop's duty. Thinking of Mabel.

"Hey," the cop calling. "This week's password. You know I've got to check you."

The moment of panic. Wrong Harry in the shadows. Sharing the surging fear of the real Harry out there under the streetlights. The cop suddenly suspicious. Starting to draw his weapon. And the real Harry desperate enough to draw and fire from the hip with an empty heater. Nothing. Throwing it away disgusted.

"Okay, I don't know the password. Forgot my dues."

"You know the law." The cop tuning in his pocket radio for the wagon.

Wrong Harry tense in the shadow. Knowing the next move. Wagon to 602 and a two minute trial. Jet to prison. This was Fate and you don't push Fate around.

And then this surface car roaring up. This hadn't happened before.

And Torso with a bandaged head, climbing out of the car and bellowing: "Ah, Harry, I've got you." A new heater in his hand.

The cop: "This man's under arrest."

"Special blanket permission from IM," Torso grinned.

"No." The cop started to fire and Torso's weapon flamed and his two victims faded and drifted away in vapor. No tickler.

And there in the nightmare the cop and the real Harry were gone and Torso—the *wrong* Torso—stood there chuckling. And started toward the surface car. And then the wrong Harry in the shadows with the heater crackling in his hand. And all of Torso that reached the car was a thin whitish vapor drifting past in the wind.

No ticklers. Harry wondered if he'd avenged anything. Maybe not. But if his blast voltage had turned on the scanners he had seconds. Faraway a siren keened. Harry ran. He took Torso's car and he drove and twisted around a dozen blocks and slowed down. All was quiet now.

He stopped at the curb. He lit a cigarette. The wrong Torso had killed the

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right Harry. And it took a few minutes to convince himself that he could still exist like this. Now there were two Gloomys. And the right Torso, somewhere, unaware of all this. And himself—the wrong Harry.

He kicked in the jets and cruised away. He hoped the scanners had not activated. Sometimes the watchers down at headquarters would monitor the scanners and let you run around free. Let you get in deeper and deeper and then they'd grab you.

But Harry had it planned now. And he meant to follow the plan till his luck ran out. And maybe it wouldn't.

* * *

THE lights were already on when he got home. He stepped through the entrance with his heater aimed. There sat the real Gloomy and a corpse in a prison suit. And the corpse was also Gloomy. And it had a time watch on its wrist.

"I'm seeing double," Gloomy blurted, the Gloomy who had never been in prison—yet. Too excited to worry about his pal Harry's heater. "Look at this dead guy, pal. Claimed he's me. Stumbled into my flat tonight just after I paid my dues and rubbed out a guy named Jones. My Mabel saw him and figured it was some dirty trick of Limpy-The-Fix-it. Putting some nut in my pattern for a gag.

"Limpy didn't do it," Harry said. He stood there with the heater. He kicked the door closed and then locked it.

"It's crazy," Gloomy said. "How else but Limpy? Look at 'im. He's dead and he's me, except he's got Big House clothes on and a funny wrist watch. Came bleeding into my place. Kept saying he was my other self. Said you'd understand. So I brought him over and he died on the way. Kept mumbling something about lousy time travel. And how a flock of lunatic dames ganged him and beat him to death twenty years in the future. That's crazy talk, Harry. But *look* at the guy! Just look at him!"

Harry reached and took the time watch off the dead Gloomy's wrist. So now he had a pair.

"Don't get excited," Harry said. "Did he also tell you about winning Mabel from me with Mabel's loaded dice?"

Gloomy's face lost a lot of its color. "Now listen, Harry. She talked me into it. It was her idea. I know the penalty, but put down that heater, pal."

"Take off your clothes. To your underwear." Harry stood and watched his pal strip down to essentials, but arguing, pleading.

What had Mabel ever seen in this blubbering slob?

"H-Harr-ee-e-e-! Don't—" Then Gloomy broke into a chuckle. He slapped his hairy thigh and giggled and gasped and roared. Tears of joy started streaming down his cheeks just like the manual explained. He seemed to be trying to get it over to Harry—the huge joke. The funniest joke in all the world. He collapsed on the floor.

Harry gave him the full blast and watched him fade.

"We're even," he said and he opened some windows so he wouldn't have to breathe so much of Gloomy. Then he put on the man's discarded, oversized clothes. And he figured he would leave Gloomy's other timetraveling corpse there to confuse 602 and perhaps "prove" Harry's innocence in that demise. Unless the scanners were watching.

He packed a few things in a bag. And a time watch on either wrist. He put a spare charge capsule in his heater chamber and he lugged the bag to Torso's car.

"Maybe this is crazy," he muttered. But he drove to Limpy's.

IV

LIMPY opened his door.

"It's me. Harry."

Few people ever saw Limpy because of his profession which was known and

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available only to 602 circles. Limpy had a face made of many parts taken from discarded patterns. There were a few other Fixits in the IM world. But none could wear a more hideous array of features to prove his craftsmanship.

"I think you're hot," Limpy greeted, opening the door wide. "There's a mix-up about a triple blasting across town tonight. The scanners say you're supposed to be dead."

Harry stepped in. As his host turned around and leaned on the inside of the door Harry held out three stones, each worth a fortune.

"These," he said, "are not hot. And I need a real quick switch to Gloomy's pattern." The man took the gems from him.

"I'll agree you need a switch. Just the head or all over?"

"Complete," Harry said. "A twelve hour temporary."

"Just a minute." Limpy held a powerful magnifier and peered long at the Martian stones. Finally he nodded. The stones are okay. But it's unap—"

"This'll make it easier for you." Harry handed over a final stone.

Satisfied, Limpy led the way into the cement walled lab with its electronics pattern baths and file tubes. He plucked a long tube out of the G-H column and inserted it into a socket and set the dials.

"You want Gloomy on a twelve-hour temporary that'll fade back and leave no afterimage on your basic, eh?"

"And fast."

"Well, slow down," Limpy said dryly. "A twelve fade puts an overpeak load on cathodes. And it may burn a couple grids and they're expensive." His mismatched eyes kept probing at Harry's bulging pockets.

"Two more?" Harry said.

The man nodded, licking all his lips. He took the stones.

Then Harry climbed in the tank while the ports were sealed. He held his breath until the gas hissed in. He could see Limpy's left face leering in at him. The lightning broke from all surfaces of the tank needling his body in a million contacts. He could feel the tissue building and all his muscles building. The ozone stank and the thirty seconds seemed an hour. He came out gasping for breath, sweating. And in the mirror he was a perfect Gloomy, atom for atom, for the next twelve hours.

As the tingling ebbed from his bones he drove toward Gloomy's fla+

* * *

"Well," Mabel cooed, "you took long enough, Gloomy."

He was loving this.

"I had to take that crackpot to Harry's. You know that. The guy died."

"Good," she smiled. "All those cuts and bruises. And him looking so much like you. He made me sick."

"No wonder," said Harry. "Limpy-The-Fixit just told me. This guy came at him with a gat. Forced him to do it. Then Limpy beat him half to death."

"No," Mabel said. "Beat him to death —period. You say he died."

Harry smiled with Gloomy's thick lips. This moll would swallow any wild tale. Just so long as Gloomy told it.

He could tell this talk bored her and she wanted to get down to essentials.

"We're all alone tonight, Gloomy."

She cuddled in a loveseat. All properly perfumed and decked out in that same transparent negligee Harry had bought her the week before that crap game.

"Just us," he said.

"I forgot to tell you," she giggled. "That dumb Harry. He was over here around sundown. While you were gone. Begging me to come back. I laughed at him. I told him about those shaded dice and he got mad and stomped off. Just like Harry. So soft hearted he lets you walk all over him."

"No guts," Harry said.

"It's unfair, Gloomy. That a jerk like him should even be eligible to check me out of the library."

"Forget him," he said.

"You know—really—why I didn't like Harry?" she said. "Too skinny. I

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just can't *stand* a skinny man. The way his bones stick out!"

Harry patted his twelve hour temporary middle. It made a dull drum sound. "Come here, baby," he said. He dangled the extra time watch.

She came with a little sigh. "Oh, how pretty. Only it's a man's model."

"We're going on a nice trip," he said. He buckled it on her and set it back far into the past.

"I love traveling, Gloomy-baby," she cooed.

"Not just yet," and he kissed her. Long and right. With cooperation.

"You wait here, huh, kid? I'll just be a minute—"

"Sure."

He leaned back, watching her walk into the hall. Wearing that transparent garment of love. All his. She closed the door, still smiling.

A minute went by. Five minutes. . . .

* * *

SUDDENLY the room was swarming with two types of muscle plus heaters. Cops and IM guys. There was Suzie-The-Hacksaw shaking her head at him. And Mabel.

"The finger," said Suzie, "is on you—Harry."

He tried to leap up, was shoved down.

"I'm Gloomy!" he declared.

"Want to bet?" said Suzie.

Somebody grabbed him by the neck and slammed him into the chair.

"I knew it," Mabel raged. "I knew it the minute he kissed me. Nobody in the world but Harry kisses like that. He's killed Gloomy and he's in Gloomy's pattern. So I called for help."

"That wasn't necessary." Suzie's eyes glittered coldly. "But it helped. Security already found out from Limpy. And the scanners traced your unauthorized burn of Torso's other self, Harry. Then your dues aren't paid. And you burned Gloomy—scanners got that, too. And Gloomy's mangled second corpse in your place. How do I know?' she smiled.

"I've time-travelled too. I'm two Suzies now."

"Fry 'im! Fry the dirty bum," screamed Mabel. "Kill i'm!"

"On the 13th in the hotseat," Suzie smiled.

"But Suzie," Harry gasped, "you've got to come. With this watch on the 12th. To spring me like before. It's already happened that way."

"Not anymore. You're not the real Harry. You're just a substitute for frying. And how could I bring you the watch? You're already wearing it?"

"Now he isn't," rumbled a familiar voice. Huge fingers ripped the gadget from Harry's wrist.

"The future is quite flexible, apparently," Suzie smiled.

And then Torso, the one who had stayed in his own time, was leering in his face. "So you killed me, eh, Harry?" And licking his lips. "I'll be there watching you fry, Harry."

They took him away and he went quietly.

* * *

IN PRISON at nine a.m. the next day — the eleventh — Gloomy's image faded in that typical prickling torture period of atomic peeling. And he was Harry again, whose bones stuck out, and whose clothing suddenly fitted awfully loose. Sometimes he felt a bit lonesome for Gloomy.

And on the twelfth, when Suzie *did not* come, it seemed very wrong.

He felt sorry for IM and 602. They'd fight Sweetness and Light. Up and down time. Crime after crime. Double-crossing themselves like he had. But he, Harry, would become a legend: The last man in legal history to fry; the first to louse up in time.

He smiled, dreaming tomorrow's headlines: HARRY-THE-HEATER SIZZLES SOLO! Star of his own big show.

But it wouldn't be permanent. Maybe his living duplicate, forty years future, wasn't very *manly*. But still. . . .

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He was looking, he told me, for men

SOME LIKE IT COLD

By DAVE DRYFOOS

THIS Dyt was a likeable kid, see. I didn't want to carry out no sentence of banishment on *him*. You take a guy to the Outer Edges, and sooner or later he goes over—and out of existence.

So it was tough, because he'd broken the law all right, as far as I could tell. Harming Rational Critters—that's Section 509.1. Banishment is the penalty. And I was the cop would have to enforce it, if the Judge said to.

Dyt's Old Man was the one got him

The aliens judged the Earth—according to their lights!

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into this mess. Claimed there was a possibility of life—*rational* life—in some of the Visual Systems.

I guess you know that a Visual System is a bunch of stars that gives off light-waves—rays like our Sun's radio-shine, only longer. It don't sound very reasonable there'd be rational life in a light-system, so it's no wonder Dyt's Old Man got hooted at. I mean, look, they said in court that the wave-length of a star's radiation is more or less related to its temperature. So if a star gives off mostly visible light, instead of microwaves like our Sun does, you'd think it'd be all wrong for life.

Even if there *was* life of some kind or other, folks said it couldn't be rational. Matter itself must be different in that kind of a System. Time would be different. So any life down there must be awfully different from us, they said. And if it differs from us, how could it be rational? People shouted the Old Man down.

But this kid Dyt wasn't going to stand for his Old Man being a laughing-stock, so he went after the facts.

His father wasn't anxious for him to go, but finally doped out the most likely coordinates, and sent him off. Dyt went by adaptation—became a comet, like.

SO ALL right, he gets there to this planet his father told him to look for. It was so small he almost cracked into it—denser than anything he'd ever imagined. And when he got there, he didn't know what he was looking for.

He was a kid, you understand. Impetuous.

There was a visual star by way of Sun, all right, just like the Old Man told him. It was small, and rotating fast.

Around it was something under a dozen planets, some with satellites going around them, and there was a mess of smaller stuff, too.

And it was all dominated by visual light. You can't imagine what that does—I can't, anyhow. Time, for instance. Why, if you lived on this planet he visited—they call it Earth—every single time your little planet rolled over, it would be a day. And every time your little planet ran around its star, that would count for a year.

This Dyt was just a kid, like I said. But on our cosmic time-scale, where it's a year every time our Sun goes once around the Galactic Center, why, every one of our years is a couple hundred million times as long as one of Earth's, so Dyt was maybe as old as the planet itself.

Now, how would you make contact with the men of a planet that much different from what we're used to? I sure wouldn't know. And neither did Dyt.

Compared to that unbelievably dense planet he was just a soft cloud, so he kind of enveloped it and rested in its gravitational field.

He was looking, he told me, for men. I asked him once, I said, "Dyt, if we're men, and those people are so different from us, how come they're men, too?"

"Why," he said, "it's just a matter of word-play. Whatever kind of rational being exists anywhere is a man. It's rationality makes the man, and not the size or the color of him, or anything."

Well, that sounds all right too—till you think about it.

What it boils down to is, that he was looking for men without knowing what in the world they'd be like.

By adaptation he got organized to be light-sensitive instead of radio-sensitive, and he watched, and there were some unbelievable sorts of life down there all right, but nothing you'd call very fancy.

He looked for artifacts, he told me. That's his word, naturally—all these fancy scientific words are his, and if it sounds to you like I don't understand them, why, don't worry, pal—your hearing's o.k.

But of course Dyt was looking for things like his Old Man's visual telescopes and radio receivers and computers and such, or buildings that might house them, or something like that. The

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best he could make out, though, was some weak-looking critters that created artificial light and heat by oxidizing bits of their vegetation. (Those are some of Dyt's words, right there.)

Anyhow, some of those critters would kind of keep a favorite stone to pound with, too, instead of getting a new one every time they wanted to pound. But you don't have to be very smart to do that.

Main thing that discouraged Dyt though, was the ice. You'll have to take his word for this, because we don't have none I could show you, but there's a substance they call water, and it flows and is gathered into what they call oceans, but whenever it gets cold it turns into a solid they call ice. And when heated, it can be a vapor.

So all right. Now, that star this planet Earth went around, it gave off a lot of heat and light. And Dyt, he came between the planet and its star, so he thought maybe he'd have a cooling effect on the planet.

But he didn't. He's positive, he says, that he kind of held the heat in and that the planet got warmer under him than if he hadn't of been there.

But though he felt it get warmer, and was positive it did, that darned planet Earth acted just like it had got colder. Big ice-sheets that had capped the poles began spreading out under him till they covered a good deal of the land, and locked up so much water that the sea was shrunk. That's what Dyt told me!

RIGHT away he figures a thing like that is contrary to reason, so some sort of rational creature must be doing it. I mean, it wouldn't have happened by itself, like.

But he couldn't tell what caused it. And he had to find out, because if he didn't get some real proof there were men on this planet, his father would be made to look like a fool. So Dyt wasn't satisfied with just guessing.

To see if he himself caused the ice, he visited other planets of that System. First he went to the one nearest its star. He found out this one always faced its Sun, so a day was as long as a year. And there was no ice.

Then he went back to Earth, and the ice that had shrunk while he was gone began to spread again. He couldn't figure it out. He was sure that he raised the surface temperature, instead of lowering it when he came between Earth and its Sun, so he supposed somebody must be trying to signal him, or something.

This was the proof he'd gone after, and it made him very happy for his Old Man's sake. But it needed more checking.

He went to the planet that travels next to Earth on the Sun side, and he didn't form any ice there. He went back to Earth, and sure enough, the ice began to grow a third time.

But to make sure men were causing that, he went on to another planet—the one that goes next to Earth on the side away from the Sun.

He saw just what he didn't want to see. Ice formed—not nearly so much of it, but some.

And there wasn't any rational life there! Dyt was sure of it. All he could make out by way of living things was some primitive vegetation, he said.

Besides, if there'd been men on each of those two planets—Earth and this other one I'm talking about—and if both sets of men were making the ice as a signal, they'd have to be in communication with each other some way. And there weren't enough artifacts for that. So the ice didn't prove anything after all.

You can guess how he felt. All his hopes were going glimmering. He went back to Earth to see if there wasn't something he'd overlooked.

And there was. I mean, maybe he hadn't overlooked it, if it had kind of developed while he was away; but anyhow, there were men on the planet, now.

Tiny, of course. And so funny-looking that I can't picture them. But they had

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stone tools, and containers woven out of their vegetation, and vehicles made of vegetation that would support a man or two on the water. He could tell these were men—and rational, too.

But they didn't like the cold worth a hoot. No sir! They did everything they could to cover themselves with animal-skins and take shelter in the rocks and make this artificial heat I told you about. And of course Dyt's being there made the ice spread out a fourth time.

He'd harmed them, he figured. He'd be banished for hurting rational creatures. Unless he said his Old Man was a dope and there wasn't any rational life on Earth.

He could have gotten away with that. Easy. It was what lots of people wanted to believe. The reason his Old Man's enemies made such a fuss in the first place was, they wanted to feel our Radio-Systems are something special—and that we are, too, by being rational.

If even the Visual Systems support rational life, then we're a lot more ordinary than some folks I could name would like to think, see? And this kid Dyt could have gone along with them.

He wasn't that kind of a guy, though. That's why I'm telling you the story.

He still wanted to prove his Old Man was right, see. So he came back here and confessed that he'd harmed the men his father had correctly said would be on Earth.

He was bound over for trial.

MAYBE, though, he secretly hoped to get off. He was sure he'd caused the ice some way, because it came when he came and went when he went, but he didn't know how that worked. So maybe he figured they'd never pin anything on him.

If so, he was disappointed. Some scientific rival of his Old Man, some guy who liked to insist there couldn't be any life in a Visual System, managed to prove that Dyt had created the ice.

What they called a hot-house effect. I was there in Court when it came out, because the kid was under guard and the guard was me. Head guard, that is—naturally, I didn't do the actual work, just gave the orders.

Well, anyhow, this old coot came up with a string of math that proved Dyt had increased the Earth's temperature by reflecting the Sun's heat back to Earth so it got warmer, and that made it colder.

Sure! The hotter it got, the more water was evaporated, and the more was evaporated, the more fell—they used words like rain, and snow—and pretty soon more was falling than was evaporating, so there were these ice-sheets.

If I'd of been the judge I'd have throwed the case out right then, because even if I'm no scientist I know it don't get colder just because it gets hotter, but the kid, he had to stand and take it because everybody believed that stuff.

Still, the Court gave him a chance to deny there was any rational life influenced by this hot-cold. Instead, he told them he was sure his Old Man was right, and these more or less miserable inhabitants of Earth were rational men.

Then the Old Man stood up in court and he said, "My son has told you how different time is on Earth from what we experience. Why not delay sentencing, therefore, till we see what develops? In a month or two, those Earthmen might advance their culture enough to communicate with us, and then we can be sure of Dyt's innocence or guilt. As it is now, all the evidence is circumstantial."

But the Court rapped for order and said, "Your son's confession, my friend, is not circumstantial. I'll give you exactly twenty-four hours to develop any new evidence you may find, and if there's none, I'll pass sentence."

Now, that Judge wasn't being as tough as he tried to sound, because twenty-four of our hours is a lot of time on Earth. Of course, he didn't want to give the other side a chance to say he

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was being soft. But he must have liked the way this kid Dyt stood up for his Old Man—I sure did.

Now, though, it was the Old Man's turn to stand up for the kid, and I could see he didn't know what to do. Just for ducks he went up to the Observatory.

He stayed there all night. Of course he couldn't see Earth by any telescope whatever, so he focussed the astronomical radio-receiver there, just as a forlorn hope.

I'd gone along by Court Order to kind of snoop on what he might try to do. And I found out quick he wasn't pulling any fast ones.

He was just trying to prove himself wrong, see. Trying to prove that this Earth wasn't a part of a Visual System at all. If it was a Radio-System, like ours, then everything the kid had said would have been tossed out the window as so much hokum gotten up to make his Old Man look good.

This Old Man—his name was Dyt, too, and that's why I don't use it much—this Old Man must have been quite a guy, in his way. Because he was trying to undermine his own life's work to help out the kid.

The two of them—kind of nice, you know. I mean, a cop like me sees so many families that don't do nothing but battle all the time. . . .

WELL, I don't want to mention names, and haven't, but these guys that had hooted at the Old Man, why, they'd come around to the Observatory to have a real good laugh, see, and they were there when the Old Man turned around and said, "Say, they've invented artificial radio on Earth—I can pick up their signal!"

Right away he could have bitten off his tongue. This was artificial radio, see—it couldn't exist in a natural Radio-System. And if it was invented, the inventors were rational men. Dyt was practically over the edge already.

I guess the Old Man would have been too much the scientist to have kept it quiet, anyhow. You never know, though.

But with those other guys there, all scientists themselves and hot to show him up, the Old Man didn't have a chance. Right away they doped out a hookup to pipe those radio-signals through a translating computer and prove they were artificial.

They were, too. The computer could tell the difference between language and music and showed they were both coming in. After an hour or two it even began to learn the languages. This was a little tough, I understand, because time on Earth went by so fast that the pronunciations changed every couple of minutes and that made the basis of the computer's learning kind of shift, as they say.

But it got the dope. Found out these people were very inventive. They hadn't the power of adaptation that we do, but they'd developed machines to help them, and had even left their Earth and gone to its satellite in some kind of a complicated vehicle they'd invented to do what we do naturally.

They'd studied physics, just like Dyt and his Old Man, and had learned how to make atomic power. Also bombs, to destroy each other with. They kept boasting about it to each other, so we got the whole story through the computer.

It seems there were two sides. Each wanted to destroy the other, so they both kept on making bombs as fast as ever they could. And in the process, discharged a lot of exhaust gases into their atmosphere.

Yup, you've guessed it. Those gases floating around and reflecting radiation were just like Dyt had been. That same hot-cold effect was beginning to be noticeable down there.

But each side was afraid to quit making bombs.

Neither side would admit to being afraid, of course. Instead, each boasted.

One side had developed a lot of harbors, or something—valuable properties, anyhow, right along the edges of

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those bodies of water called oceans. And if the ocean-level dropped, that would give the opposition an advantage, they claimed, because they didn't have so many harbors and wouldn't be so disrupted.

In reply, though, the harbor-people pointed out that their enemies were located much closer to the pole, so if the ice spread, it would engulf them, first.

You can judge the amount of fear each side had, by the amount of fear it tried to cause in the other. But neither would stop discharging the gases, so it kept getting hotter, which meant it would get colder, and ice was already starting when the Old Man switched off. I figured that was a gesture of despair.

But he got up in court next day, the Old Man did, and he made a speech that put a different light on things. I remember every word.

"As my learned colleagues will verify," he told the Judge, pointing at a whole, sour-looking row of his worst enemies, "as my learned colleagues will verify, these inhabitants of the planet Earth—and we may as well call them men—these brothers of ours in the Visual-System, have invented a whole technology, much more magnificent than any we've previously discovered.

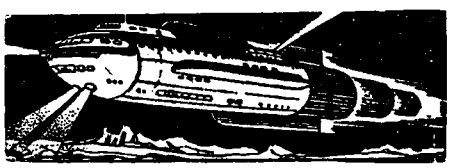
"That, of course, proves the Earthmen are rational. Yet, being rational, these Earthmen have, as my learned colleagues will also verify, embarked on a course of conduct that will bring—probably, by now, has brought—additional ice-sheets to their planet, ice-sheets like those my son Dyt is accused of 'wrongfully, wilfully, and/or negligently causing, creating, and/or encouraging,' as the complaint says.

"But when rational men create an ice-sheet, they must like it! My son, in creating the earlier ice-sheets, can thus have done them no injury. I ask that the case be dismissed!"

Brother! The Judge had to rap for five minutes before his dismissal ruling could be heard, we hollered so.

But the Old Man's enemies weren't quieted. No, sir. They're powerful people, and I don't want to mention names, but they haven't given up their attack.

They've gone right back to the beginning. They're still, to this very day, trying to make out that Dyt's Old Man is a bum. Claim those Earthmen, because they're so plainly making things tough for themselves, aren't rational at all! Stubborn, aren't they?



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A Novelet

The Night the World TURNED OVER

I

THE needle was still oscillating moderately at eleven o'clock that night, as it had for the past month. The overturn was going to happen sometime in the next seventy-two hours, I was sure of it; but that was as near as I could say. My brain was fagged out from my computations. I decided to knock off and hit the sack.

The house-phone rang for me while I was in the shower. I turned the water off and reached for it. Celia's golden commanding voice, of course. From her penthouse seventy-eight stories above the street to me in the sub-basement.

"Lulu Lamartine the TV star is here with her roommate Dr. Habburat the anthropologist, Lowell," she said peremptorily. "Quit fiddling with your idiotic geophysical apparatus or cleaning out the garbage-cans, or whatever you're doing, and come on up. We're all ravening for a game."

"What kind of a game, incomparably beautiful billionaire princess?" I asked, as if I cared.

"A cent a point, if you insist," she said. "You can certainly afford that much, with janitor's wages what they are. Particularly since contract is the one thing you're not too impossibly bad at."

"I play a fast game of two-handed tiddlywinks, too," I reminded her, from force of habit. "When all is said and done, it's still the king of indoor sports. Or queen, depending on your point of view. Why not let me give you a course of free instructions, Ceel? After all, you're scheduled to be twenty-five come next ground hog day, and old enough for big girl games."

As if she would ever see her next birthday! Or anyone.

"Don't be so tediously male all the time, Lowell," she said disdainfully. "Your mind runs in a rut. Colonel Ames was supposed to make a fourth, but her

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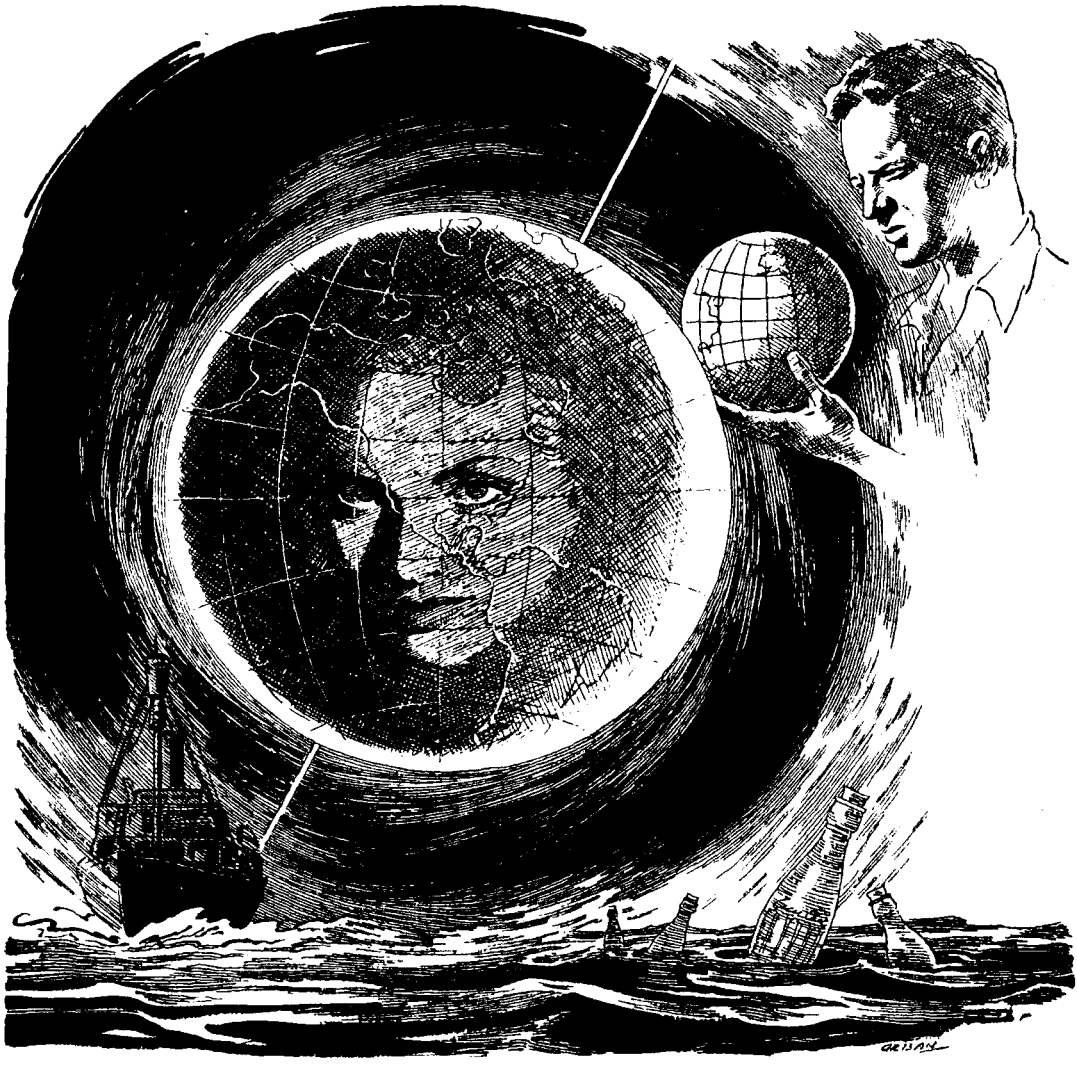
He had it all figured, except for one angle, and she had the loveliest curves on earth. . . .

By JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS



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adjutant phoned that she had to fly to Washington. It seems the gruesome Russians have just started all-out war."

"They chose a silly time for it," I couldn't help saying. "The big flop is going to happen in three days, at the outside. Or maybe hours. And where'll they be then, with their hundred thousand atom howitzers and eighteen million Ivans? Not to mention us, including your still unconceived of children."

"Oh, heavens!" she said. "A man and a monomaniac. You and your overturning earth. If there were anyone else at this hour. But at least you can shuffle. Look, the big war's started, can't you understand? Don't bother to dress. Just get on the elevator and come as you are."

"I'm in the shower, angel, with the large bronze mesomorphic map all lathered up from Spitzbergen to Tierra del Euego," I told her. "May I take time to de-suds myself and grab a towel?"

"Of course. Don't be so technical all the time, Lowell," she said. "Put on your dungarees or something. Really, I'm quite sure you're not so unique a specimen as you'd like to think, in your male conceit."

"I know," I said a little tiredly. "There are a billion two hundred and eighty-three million males on the planet, all alike. Illustration 1, page 19, Introductory Biology for the Eighth Grade. But there are a billion four hundred and ninety-six million females. Why did I have to latch my libido onto you?"

"Why, indeed?" she said. "Go find yourself some other one of the billion and whatever. Any other. It's obviously what your system needs, for some reason that's beyond me. So far as I'm concerned, if you were the last man on earth—"

"Don't say it," I begged her. "It makes me feel inferior."

"We've just cut for partners," she told me. "Habburat and I are playing north and south against Lamartine and you. After the first rubber we'll switch over."

"Quite possibly we shall. With a swoosh."

"Really, if you're going to keep harping—"

"No," I said. "I'm only half a harp. The other half is Greek, Polack, Scots and Cherokee. You're right—what difference does it make? Hero diddled while the earth turned over, and we might as well play bridge. Or did she swim the Hellespont? My brain's a little mixed tonight. Okay, boss. I'll be up."

"Don't bring your free ambidextrous theatrical passes with you, either, Lowell," she said. "We want to play bridge. Period."

I NEEDLE-SHOWERED the soap off, and toweled myself, put on a white sport shirt, slacks, and rope-soled espadrilles. I looked at the apparatus dial while I combed my hair.

The needle was still moving with its slow rhythm. Nothing final yet. But on the graph the latest peaks and valleys seemed to have become a little more pronounced, and closer together, even in the last eight or ten minutes.

Beneath my feet I seemed to feel a straining and a trembling deep in Manhattan's profound rock. But that might have been auto-suggestion.

My lab table was covered with yellow sheets of equations. Earth still spinning on its wobbling way. Spinning fast towards doom.

If it was going to be tonight, I might as well be playing bridge as sleeping. At least alone. I took the penthouse elevator up.

Seventy-Seven Tower, on the northwest corner of 77th Street and Central Park West, was a strictly female joint, or haunt, or whatever is the word for it. Seventy-seven stories, not counting Celia's penthouse, with ten super-efficiency apartments to the floor, inhabited exclusively by the top grade of successful business and professional girls. Allowing an average of one and three-sevenths per apartment—that made eleven hundred babes, plus Celia. But try to make just one of them yourself.

I don't say that Seventy-Seven's ten-

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ants were all man-haters. They just didn't see any particular necessity for the species. They were all self-sufficient gals who had jumped into the upper pay brackets early—which is about a hundred times as easy for a good-looking girl in New York as for a man of any age. With all the big-dough careers they'd monopolized, they hadn't any yearning to start buying haircuts for some male goof who might not even be a good cook.

The doormen and desk-clerks and dining-room captain and house dicks and the cigar counter attendant were all girls. The furniture slipcovers all buttoned on the left-hand side. Even the plumbing fixtures had strictly female threads. No men visitors were allowed except in the small guest-parlor off the downstairs lobby, furnished with a couple of straightbacked chromium chairs, a mezzo tint of the leaning tower of Pisa, and a stuffed peacock with a silly leer in his astigmatic glass eyes.

The only males in the building for the past month, in fact, were a moth-eaten bull rat which had staggered into my quarters one early morning along the sewer pipes from a Harlem brewery and a small frightened cockroach which I had been summoned to exterminate in the shower of Miss Diane Starbuckle, Vassar '51, (the Sheer Daintees model in 67F). I had picked him up by his whiskers and flushed him down the can, on his way to the wide free sea and the Coney Island beach—and then there was me, myself, I, moi, yo, Don S. Lowell, Esq.

II

MY PRESENCE, unlike that of Mr. Fields, my only pal and foxhole buddy until a sleek young doe rat with a saucy tail had lured him away into the darkness of the sewers, and Tom the peeping cockroach who had aspired too high, was due strictly to biological necessity. I mean you can have girl doormen and headwaiters, even cooks; cowboys and aviators, cops, wrestlers, admirals and presidents. But there never was a babe born yet who wanted a career in a rat-ridden cellar.

I was the six-foot hundred-and-ninety pound hairy-chested skeleton in the basement—Lowell the janitor, the essential subterranean male. Keeping the heat and hot-water going, the automatic elevators, incinerators and dynamos, and

UNINHIBITED IMAGINATION

IF YOU were fortunate enough to have read MOMENT WITHOUT TIME in the April TWS, you have met Joel Townsley Rogers and other introductions are surperfluous. If not, leave no turn unstoned until you acquire a copy of that fast vanishing issue, for there was anthology material if we ever saw it. And here is another of the same ilk.

Rogers is basically a writer for the high-powered slick magazines, but is the victim of an uninhibited imagination which frequently takes him in hand and turns out a story too indigestible for that circumspect trade. When this happens the slicks' loss is our gain, as witness the afore-mentioned stories plus such other items as THROUGH THE BLACKBOARD and so on.

It is our contention that Mr. Rogers is a born science-fiction writer and we have high hopes of weaning him away altogether from such old-fashioned markets as the Satevepost.

—*The Editor.*

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taking care of the leaky washers, dripping radiators, the overflowing bathtubs and the stuck floating balls was my mission in life.

The job had come to me after the Natural History Museum had been torn down five months before to make way for Seventy-Seven. I had been in charge of the Planetarium, and one fine February morning had found myself smothered among the fallen Pleiades and the crashing bricks. I hadn't read the newspapers, I guess, to learn that Celia had taken over.

There not being any big boiling demand for astrophysicists, I had sold her real-estate holding corporation's personnel department on the idea that I was a natural for the janitorial post in the new Tower. Maybe I did put a canary in my voice and intimate that I'd had mumps during adolescence. But I'd needed the job, being fond of my daily beans. Then, too, it had seemed something just to be beneath the same roof with her again, even though separated by seventy-eight steel-beamed and concrete floors.

Little Celia Powers! No more than a dozen years ago she had been a curly-haired saucer-eyed twelve-year-old. She'd lived in the second-floor flat under ours which was above the Old Dickens Bar on Tenth Avenue, down in Hell's Kitchen. Though I had been fifteen myself, and a senior at Tech High, I'd been nuts about her even then.

She'd had it, from the youngest age, even before she had started filling out with that shape like all the babes in the Steve Canyon comics. Just to look into her big boo eyes, you would want to flap your arms and fly or go around looking for some dragon to smack.

Still this angel knew all the angles. Her old man, old Bunghole Powers, had run the Old Dickens and been his own moistest customer. She had to learn the score. Beneath her Bo-Peep curls, behind her large dewy African-violet gaze and dimpled smile, she had a mathematical calculator for a brain quicker at figuring out sixteen simultaneous variables than the whole hundred-ton electronic computator at Harvard.

She hadn't wasted any more time than the law required with formal education. She had started as a junior office-girl with the eminent old Wall Street house of Witzheimer and Company at twenty-two dollars a week. That had been at the end of World War II, with the market surging up and down in waves. In three months she had become the firm's leading trader. By 1949, when she was twenty-one, she was Witzheimer and Company.

Celia had acquired the site for Seventy-Seven the previous winter, when New York City had met with a series of uncalculated disasters—when the six East River bridges cracked and buckled for causes not explained, and the main aqueducts shifted underground. The addition of half a million new arrivals to the relief rolls in the month of January alone, plus the Great White Collar Strike, had jammed the entire city against the financial wall.

In that time of crisis she had offered through Witzheimer and Company a loan of a hundred million dollars for ninety-nine years at a tax-free three per cent, plus lease of the Museum site for the same period. Thus doing me out of my Planetarium job, as well as a lot of Abyssinian gazebooks and old dinosaur bones out of their homes.

BUT everything works out for the best in this best of all possible worlds, as the old saying goes. Seventy-Seven was a great architectural improvement over that crumbling old sandstone monstrosity. Its glass and chromium spire rose eight hundred and fifty feet beside the park, almost in the exact geographical center of Manhattan's stony spine, its foundation trusses going down two hundred feet and locked into the rock.

The city got an additional source of tax revenue instead of an expenditure. The better grade of stuffed bull animals in the museum had the stuffing taken out of them, which must have felt hot

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in summer, and got spread on Seventy-Seven's lobby and hall floors for a rug's eye view of nylon-clad loveliness.

As for me, my janitorial salary was fifteen bucks a month more than I'd gotten for playing Atlas and wheeling all the constellations in the sky around, and frequently getting a stiff neck. At the same time I had plenty of space to set up my inclinometer apparatus and leisure to work on my figures, numerical, that is, which otherwise I might not have been able to.

During those early months of 1952, with all the earth strained by that imperceptible trembling.

The elevator had brought me to the penthouse floor. I pushed the door open, and stepped out into Celia's living-room.

Celia and her guests were out on the terrace beyond the glass walls. I crossed the fifty-foot spun-chinchilla rug as soft as mice's ears, past the huge gold built-in pipe-organ TV combination and the rose-petal divans, to the terrace door.

The night outside was cloudless and full of stars. A big red gibbous moon was in the west.

The whole panorama of the lighted city lay spread out from the penthouse terrace. On one side Central Park was a sixth of a mile below, with Fifth Avenue beside it looking like a sequined ribbon. On the other side, beyond Riverside Park and the endless firefly cars along the West Side Highway, there was the Hudson, with moored and running lights of boats on it and its ancient submerged bed running out a hundred miles beneath the sea.

Radio masts with red airplane-warning beacons stood on the crest of the Palisades, and lighted signs at the river edge all up and down the Jersey shore—"Drink Old Goat", "Spal for Frying", "Wash with Spun." Up at the amusement park across from Grant's Tomb the roller-coaster was lit up like a string of flying beads, and next to it the moving airline time-sign spelled out letter by letter in endless chain, "It's honeymoon time in Miami. The time is now 11:09. Fly with your girl to those balmy air-conditioned beaches, $108 a round trip plus tax. The time is now 11:10."

Farther to the north, beyond George Washington bridge and Fort Tryon Park, you could see Cassiopeia and Polaris in the sky over Westchester. They had never looked so big and white.

To the south, below Central Park, shone the General Motors' sign, and all the pink sky-haze of the Broadway lights. Rockefeller Center's tall white cliffs. The red-lit dirigible mast of the Empire State, and all the rest of midtown, and over to the left the Chrysler needle, and the glass monolith of the UN all lit up. All of Manhattan's great massed spires!

The mighty city! Man's most magnificent edifices. The world into which I'd been born. I might have been born into another world, in another age, in Egypt in Pharaoh's time or Atlantis before the flood, or on another planet in another solar system. But this one was my own.

And it was going to end, any day or hour or moment now, as near as I could figure it.

III

CELIA and her friends had set up the bridge table beside the southwest parapet. She was shuffling a deck of cards. Golden-haired and golden-skinned with summer sundeck tan, in a gold halter and white fluffy bouffant floor-length skirt like a smothering of sea-foam. Golden seraph in fleecy skirt of clouds. Baby Aphrodite clad netherly by a white loving lave of waves.

For years I'd been carrying the torch for her. That unobtainable pulchritude. But that, too, would end.

The black-haired girl sitting on her left, cream-skinned and sultry, was Lulu Lamartine in the flesh, the choice of seven million male TV fans for president. She was wearing one of her famous off-the-bosom gowns, white bodice and midnight-spangled skirt, a flash of

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diamond question-mark on one small edible ear. The red-haired girl with milk-white shoulders turned to me, above a cool lime-green strapless froth of gown, must be La Lulu's roommate, Dr. Habburat . . . She looked around, with big black damson eyes and dark red cherries for a mouth. And whatever she should habburat, she had it. A complete fruit basket.

"This is Lowell," Celia said, giving me her adoring smile. "Don Solomon Lowell. The Don isn't a title, it's a name. His father knew a horse. The Solomon he took himself, expressing his ambitions. I'll let you guess whether he went to Harvard. He got his master's degree at nineteen, an adolescent prodigy, and has remained one ever since. Scrape the mud off your little feet, Lowell, and bow to the ladies. You've seen Lulu in her bedroom hour a hundred times, of course, while you were experimentally working on your theories. Or theoretically working on your experiments. And Eva Hubberat, from the Euphrates. The Garden of Eden country. Her father was an Aly, and she's a princess. She can trace her ancestry back to the first Adam. Only who'd want to?"

Lulu gave me a long-eyed sweep as I eased the body down across from her. Her shoulders, clear to her wishbone and below, seemed to undulate and quiver.

"Hi, Don," she said, with her crooning voice taking me by the hand and leading me out into the garden to pick night-blooming jasmine.

"Lo, Lulu," I said. "But charming. Where did you get such big eyes, grandma?"

"It's what I get paid a thousand a week for, Don," she said confidingly, smoothing the parting of her satin bodice with a finger. "Sooner or later, and doubtless sooner, you are going to ask me whether I use adhesive tape to keep it up. The answer, to you, is not too adhesive, Don."

"A guy likes to know," I said. "It saves time."

"Hello, Don," said the red-haired doll at my right, with a shy downcast sweep of houri glance. "Are scientist? Is very nice. Am scientist, also."

"Hello, Eva," I said. "Ceel said you were an anthropologist. It seems terrible to me. Why waste all that on specimens with bones in their ears?"

"Not that kind of anthropologist," she smiled shyly. "Doctor. Specialist in men's complaint. You have men gynecologists for women's trouble. Why not woman anthropologist for men?"

"Why not, indeed?" I said. "Let me say 'ah' to you, Eva. I want to tell you about my symptoms."

Celia dealt.

"Possibly I forgot to warn you both that Lowell has a one-track mind," she said. "The Tobacco Road Belt Line. Nothing on it but rickety shanties and rusty whistle-stops."

LULU pretended not to hear.

"Ceel's told us you're a complete screwball, Don," she said languidly. "Personally I'm not too vitally interested in men's mentalities, which always seemed a silly word to me. So you think the earth is going to suddenly turn over and throw us all off into the wide beyond. It sounds like a weird idea. What fun do you get out of it?"

"So amazing, Don," Eva said with a shy glance. "How could it be?"

How could it be!

"Oh, in the name of heaven!" Celia said. "You've started him off!"

"It's happened before," I said, examining my cards. "More than once, in the last three billion years. Due to the old ball getting too top-heavy and off balance. Falling over onto an even keel again, with a sudden shift of poles. How do we know? Millions-year old rocks, with their north poles pointing to what's now west or southeast. Dry desert beds which were once frozen arctic seas. The Great African Rift was probably at one time the site of the north pole. Maybe the Mindanao Deep during another age.

"Spinning," I said, sorting out my suits. "Getting more and more off bal-

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ance. Old earth, this cock-eyed globe. A two-mile-high mountain continent at its present south pole, piled with ice enough if melted to raise the whole ocean surfaces two hundred feet. No land at all at the north pole, and the remaining icebergs up there breaking away. The compensating glaciers which used to balance Antarctica over all the northern hemisphere down to Arizona and Gibraltar have been gone for thirty thousand years. A lot of other things have changed, too, since the last shift of poles. The American continent has drifted westward. The young north-south cordillera of the Rockies-Andes had risen up to swing off balance the east-west Himalayas-Alps.

"So what do you have? Suddenly the ball turns over. Still spinning without pause around its newly established poles, still sweeping in its course around the sun. But everything on it, at the moment of its flop over, is hurled off at a tangent at a thousand-mile-an-hour speed in the direction it was going.

"Interesting phenomenon to contemplate," I said, observing my jack and deuce of clubs. "Abstractly. Unfortunately it's coming. Any hour or moment now. That's what the needle says, and the needle doesn't lie. Three passes to me? Guess I'll bid three without."

"That means without an ace," Celia said sweetly. "I know you as I know a five-share trader, Don, with a rabbit's foot in his pocket and his gas-bill unpaid. I'll double."

"Pass, partner," Lulu said, with an undulation of her creamy bosom. "But it does seem too utterly fantastic. Will you keep a tight hold of me, Don, when it happens? I've never traveled at quite such a speed before."

"Pass," Eva echoed, with a soft glance. "So strange and empty it sounds, Don. Without a future. Just when I have finished my specialist training, all ready to hang out my little signboard—what is the word for it, shingle? What will there be to do? Off the earth, out there?"

"Redouble," I said, stacking my cards in my palm. "What's there to do here?"

"Oh!" said Eva, with round mouth and eyes. "Lots of things."

"For instance," Lulu said.

"Play bridge!" said Celia. "Three noes, redoubled."

She slapped down the king of clubs.

"It's just the overgrown adolescent's way of getting your attention, I tell you," she said with angel indignation. "It's his line. An intellectual fishhook. But the bait is just a worm. It's how he compensates for his inability to earn a decent living. The ineffectual professorial male conceit. Our trick, partner."

She slapped down the ace.

"And declarer's jack falls," she murmured triumphantly.

"Queen, ten, eight, seven and trey of clubs!" she said indignantly, throwing them down. "Why, you big conceited tiddlywinks champion, you thought you'd take a chance on what Lulu might have, did you? But you've found at least it wasn't clubs. You're down three already! And you've had the superb male insolence ever since your voice began to creak to assume that someday I'm going to marry you and bear your Harvard-brained offspring for you and wash your shorts and cook your ravioli till the end of time. If you were the last man on earth!"

"What an utterly appalling thought!" said Lulu, with a shiver of her bosom.

"So empty," Eva murmured. "Sad."

"Flying right off the earth," said Lulu. "Not a bed to sleep on."

"The end of the race of Adam," Eva said simply.

"If you believe him," Celia said with seraphic disdain. "Your deal, Lulu."

"It's not the way I'd want it, either, dolls," I said. "Babes. Gals. Ladies. Excuse me. How I'd want it, I couldn't say. Maybe I don't know. But there's nothing I can do about it."

"Your make, Don," Celia said emphatically.

"My make?" I said. "Who?"

"For heaven's sake, the cards!"

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IV

CARDS. The little passionless tilt of formalized skill. Four suits, of ace, three face cards, and nine numbers each. Sort them, bid them, play them.

Spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs. Take the trick or yield it. Stack your books, and cross-pile. And the old earth spinning.

There was an intangible humming through all the Tower. But a building always hums. Elevators sliding swiftly up and down. Boilers and electric generators down in the basement. In the seven hundred and seventy luxury-efficiency apartments below, radios, electric coffee-urns, sandwich-grills, silk underthings being ironed, the stir and pulse and hum of eleven hundred of the world's loveliest and most unobtainable dolls. And in a building so tall, up so high, the force of mased air strumming against it must be felt, too, like the vibration of a taut violin string, though no wind stirred at all.

What the needle of the inclinometer was saying down in the basement I didn't know, and I didn't want to know.

Lulu dealt, and I won the bid with four spades, and made them. Eva dealt, and I bid a grand slam in hearts, vulnerable, over Celia's calculating bidding up of diamonds. And got doubled by her, and redoubled, and made it for game and rubber.

"If you'd had just one club in your hand, Lowell," she said, totaling up the score.

"If I'd had one six or eight years ago, I ought to have banged you over the head and dragged you off to my lair," I said bitterly. "By this time we'd have had fourteen kids, counting the twins and sextuplets. Maybe they wouldn't have had a very long existence to look forward to. But at least they would've had some, and names. It's too damned late now."

"I haven't the least idea what you're talking about," she said. "I'm not an Irish setter, given to large litters. A thirty-eight hundred rubber. Would you mind changing seats with Don, Eva? You and Lulu—"

I remember we had begun to change places.

"It's honeymoon time in Miami," the airline sign was saying, up by the roller-coaster across the river from Grant's Tomb. "The time is now 11:39."

ALSO I remember that all New Yorkers were supposed to believe Robert E. Lee had invented the steamboat which had been named after him, and was buried in Grant's Tomb.

Eva took the chair I'd vacated, opposite Lulu, facing the west parapet and the Hudson, I remember. Sitting across from Celia, conscious of her knees—some women, I remember thinking, have pillows, and some have metal hinges, but some have knees. A rare, delicate, and complicated mechanism. Snakes and fishes don't have knees, I remember thinking. Nor mules nor horses, except a bony backward-jointed kind to sit on when they balk. Grasshoppers and fleas and other insects might have knees, I didn't know, never having studied that chapter of biology. But if they had, they were all too hoppy. There was nothing like a human knee, female, tender, sympathetic and expressive, with the feeling of vrai soie. The earth was good.

For what purpose, I remember thinking, all these fine things. To be hurled off into the void? It seemed such waste!

Lulu's knee was worth a thousand TV dollars, just alone. Anything else she threw in was gratis.

Not to disparage Eva's in any way. There is never a real comparison. One may be softer, one more pliant, but all are comforting. I loved even Celia's knee, smooth, firm, perfectly sculptured, marble Venus's or maybe Juno's, though completely unresponsive.

And all would soon end.

"East and west this rubber," I remembered Celia was saying, rechecking the score. "You and I, Don, north and south—"

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And Eva and I had just changed places, as I say, while she was telling us. I had just sat down. The moving time-sign up across the Hudson had just said 11:39 when I had glanced at it. Eastern daylight saving time. Sidereal time about 22:36:08, at seventy-four degrees and so many minutes, seconds, yards and feet west of Greenwich, forty-two degrees and so many minutes, seconds, yards and feet north. At 77th Street and Central Park West, almost in the exact center of Manhattan's spine. On July 29th, 1953. On the spinning ball called Earth.

That was the approximate moment when it happened. Instantly. The huge red lopsided moon swung with a rush from over above the Hudson down below the Empire State. Polaris with the Dipper swept into the western sky, or what had always been the west since I had known it.

There was a great groan through all the steel bones of Seventy-Seven, and I was slammed around in my chair against the parapet and Lulu. Eva and Celia herself were sprawling in a circle on the cracked floor.

"In heaven's name!" said Celia. "What on earth!"

SOUTH of us the Empire State and all the other midtown masses were bending over beneath the great red cock-eyed moon. They seemed to shed their towers and upper stories like a gang of boys on a river bank peeling off their shirts to make a dive, then toppled to the left. Their lights—all the lights of the city—had gone out.

Miles beyond, down in lower Manhattan, there was something which looked like the Woolworth Tower flying eastward through the moonswept sky, accompanied by a mass composed of all the great financial district skyscrapers like a swarm of spears, breaking up in flight.

To the southeast, along East 42nd, the Chrysler needle was toppling to the northeast. The UN building, which had been all blazing with the war excitement of mad Russia on the surge tonight, was spilling darkly over on its left flank.

We sprawled on the shattered tiles as the bones of Seventy-Seven groaned deep in their foundations.

"What on earth!" Celia gasped again, striving to pull down her foam of skirts over her milk and honey thighs. "Don Lowell, if this is one of your crazy jokes—"

Lulu and Eva said nothing. They were cowering in my arms.

"Get up!" I told them. "Run! Run for the elevator! The Waldorf and all Park Avenue are coming towards us! They may spill farther than the park! Some of the flying stuff at least is going to hit the terrace!"

It wasn't till that instant, I think, as we ran towards the door of Celia's still lighted living-room, that I was conscious of all the roar and screaming. The screaming of the girls in the building. From the streets around and from the whirling air. The roar of riven steel and stone, and the churning of New York Bay boiling up the Hudson in a hundred-foot high wall.

A great roar, a great deafening hurricane of sound. The screaming of the great city, of the world, flying through the night and past us with a vast banshee cry.

Celia's private elevator which I'd come up in was still at the floor. The girls ran across the twenty-foot-high living-room and sprawled into it, just as a torrential rain of stuff began to crash on the terrace and penthouse roof, showering plaster down from the ceiling. I smashed the glass of the air-raid alarm-gong beside the elevator as I plunged in after them, summoning everybody to the bombproof basement.

The other elevators were spilling out loads of déshabilled babes into the still bright basement when we reached it. At least our own dynamos were still operating. Two or three hundred must have gotten there before us from the lower floors. Amid all the sobbing and

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screaming the cars went shooting up again, obeying the frantic buttons. . . . By tests which had been run, in nine and three-quarters minutes after the gong they could all be evacuated down, to the last one.

It wasn't so necessary now, though. The twisting stress had lasted less than a minute. And Seventy-Seven had withstood it. There would be no repetition. The secondary danger, of being shattered by a bombardment of hurtling other buildings, had passed, as well, thanks to the location here inside the park, with the nearest skyscrapers a mile or more away.

V

BY NOW the heavier stuff must have shot clear off the earth. Broken tree-limbs and stuff like that would be all that was still floating in the whirlwind air.

Tidal waves, I thought of. But they'd not surge up this high. The ocean would subside again, and fairly quickly, beneath the bright, white cloudless stars and the red moon. After all, it had seen this thing before. It had been in business a long time.

The inclinometer needle had shot clear off the graph and back again in an inverted V. It was now registering a geometrically straight line. It might not veer from it by a ten thousandth millimeter for the next three hundred thousand years.

They were all clawing at me with a cross-rake of hysterical questions. They'd torn my shirt off, and had hold of my belt. I pulled myself free for the moment with what clothes I had, heaving my lab stool up on the table and vaulting up with it. I climbed up on top of it, holding up my hand.

"Babes!" I said. "Dolls! Gals! This is what's happened, and where we stand."

They were all career girls, trained to give instant attention to official announcements. The milling and commotion ceased at once. In the silence someone dropped a bobby-pin, but that was all.

I looked down over their lake of upturned faces. Blonde and brunette and strawberry, blue-black and smooth brown heads. Celia and Lulu and Eva, who had got separated in the melee. Miss Diane Starbuckle, wrapped in her translucent shower-curtain, with her amber curls all damp, as if still watching me pursue Tom the terrified cockroach around the baseboards and back of the pipes in her bathroom. Orange-haired Irene Moon, the baby atom-bomb of Hot Time, orchestra seats a hundred smacks. Leeta, Leta, and Lotta Joy, the blonde triplet rodeo bulldoggers from Texas, in their white buckskin shorts and Lone Star belts. Miss Aki Suki the doll Japanene artist of 44E, and Miss Yoni Sarawat from the Vale of Kashmir who did her Dance of the Bride of Kali in the most ultra private clubs, and Miss Pela Mela the delicate bronze UN secretary from Bali, in her native costume of batik.

A sea of hundreds more. Eleven hundred, at a conservative estimate. And it was a time to be conservative. From every state of the Union and Canada and Mexico, Europe and South America, Syria, the Pacific islands and the White and Blue Niles. All with upthrust bosoms. All red parted lips. The world's most beautiful and desirable and unobtainable girls.

"Babes, it's overturned," I said. "Old earth. It's found new poles. It's still spinning on, however. It's still going around the sun. There's nothing whatever to be alarmed about.

"It found its new poles, as it happened," I explained, "precisely forty-eight degrees, less some minutes and seconds, yards and feet, to the west, or left, of where its old ones were. A distance of about thirty-seven hundred miles. A distance, as it happens, precisely equal to that which Seventy-Seven here was from the old north pole.

"It turned over on the pivot of this

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geographical spot, in other words, by chance. Or, more exactly, because of a complexity of geophysical incalculables, which, if written as an equation in figures the size of hydrogen electrons, would take an angel flying with the speed of light a million years to read.

"We are still at forty-two degrees, some minutes and seconds, yards and feet north. The longitude is what we choose to call it.

"The only difference is that what was west is now approximately north of us. New Jersey, et cetera. What was south is west. Miami. East—Jones Beach, Europe—has become south. North, east. Buffalo, Niagara Falls. The sun will rise tomorrow, at this time of year, from somewhere in the direction of the Berkshires. It will set in the direction of Atlantic City. But it will rise and set. The new poles are situated—But you can take turns looking at the globe afterwards, on the table beside my stool.

"Old earth," I said, swallowing, but still giving out with the big cheerful grin, "has just found a new balance. There will be some differences and adjustments. But we're still on it. There's no more danger to any of us. None of us here is going to die tonight nor tomorrow, nor until we've lived out our full and natural spans. Any questions?"

"What's happened—!" They were all surging and shouting with raised hands. "What's happened to all the rest of the world, Lowell?"

THEY had seen some of it out of their windows, of course. Some things I hadn't myself. They had to be told.

"We turned upon the pin," I said, "without change in relative position. All around us, though, with geometrically increased speed from the pivot outward, everything went flying off in the direction earth had been spinning to that instant. But the oceans will soon subside back in their basins. The mountains are still standing. The fish are still in the lakes and rivers, or most of them. The bats survived in their caves, and the ants beneath the ground. Many of the birds, even, may have caught themselves on wing and flown against it—they have an eonal memory going back to before the last overturning, as they show in their migratory-flight patterns.

"The earth is still with us, and it will still take seed. There will be new species developing to take the place of the sheep and cattle and other larger mammals. Life marches on."

"People!" they all waved their arms and shouted. "Men! Children! Our families! Everybody! What about them?"

"Gone," I said, swallowing. "Smashed in their toppling and flying buildings, or swept off instantly from the streets and roads and fields. They never knew what hit them. In a few seconds lack of oxygen would have rendered them unconscious in outer space. They just went sweeping off. Over the whole world. All."

Silence for a moment was over them. The sea of their motionless upturned faces, red parted lips. I saw Celia working towards me through the jam.

She stood pressed against the table edge below me. She had twisted and fought her way through the pack. Her gold halter was half torn off, her white skin of clouds was ripped to ribbons, her bobbed golden curls in disarray, her face smudged. But her angelic eyes were still as beautiful and bright.

"Why, Don, you are the last—" she gasped. She lifted up her golden arms to me above her perfect breast. "Help me to climb up, darling! I'll marry you!"

From eleven hundred throats there was a single scream. *"You?"*

The rushing sea came at me. The lab table heaved, buckled, and crashed over, and I went down with it.

"You!" The scream was all around me and over me. "You and who else?"

Old earth. Old earth must be replenished. It can't be left to the fishes and the bats. To the birds and the three hundred thousand species of crawling things beneath the stone. The million years which the race has taken to come to this perfection must still go on. It was

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agreed the only fair thing was to draw straws.

They're going to hold the drawing next October 31st, Hallowe'en, which is Guy Fawkes Day in England, I understand, and Walpurgis Night over all the earth from ancient times. It may be a Mohammedan and Buddhist holiday, too, for all I know. Anyway, it's the date.

A drawing for both of us. Because I wasn't the only man, as it turned out. Patrolman Horace Bulger, Shield Number 22,835, bald and fifty-one, had just stepped in through the door of Seventy-Seven to check his watch by the lobby clock, at the moment it happened.

VI

NOW, in the warm Indian summer afternoons, in my spare moments relaxing on the Central Park wall across the street from Seventy-Seven, directing Celia, Lulu, Eva, Diane, and all the rest of my battalion of dolls in cultivating their garden plots—they each have half an acre, and some late summer onions, turnips, and potatoes have already begun to sprout—I have been turning the globe over in my hands. And, examining it from all angles, it occurs to me that in the Antipodes, at a point precisely opposite to here, there must have been another pivot on which earth turned in its overset, without change of relative position

At forty-two degrees, so many minutes and seconds, yards and feet south. At what was a hundred and six degrees, less so many minutes and seconds, yards and feet east of Greenwich. At a point in the old South Seas a thousand miles off Albany, Australia.

And I can see in my mind a ship which was at that precise spot on the water, at the instant when earth overset.

I can see it as a whaling ship, its tanks loaded with a reeking cargo officered and manned by a stalwart crew of whiskered Norwegians, Lascars, Yankee and Portygee harpooners from Cape Cod and Martha's vineyard. Boatswains, boilermen and sea cooks out of all the ports.

I can see that great white floating factory heading west-northwest for the Indian Ocean, steaming at twelve knots, with the two hundred and ninety-seven hairy men aboard her thinking of all the money they have earned and dreaming of all the girls they'll spend it on.

And suddenly the high northern forenoon sun swings over to the west. The gyroscopic heading swings from west-northwest to northeast by east. And a great maelstrom of boiling ocean swirls all about that great staunch ship, smothering her while mile-high waves lift up on the horizons.

The ocean subsides. The burst bellies of dead heavy-pressure fish from old ocean's bottom lie floating on the surface of the sea. Gulls rush by, screaming.

The ship is still afloat, but gets no reply to her radio calls. Alone on the ocean. Alone in the world. She proceeds onward cautiously, making northing by sun reckoning, and in the night by star. Until her first landfall, where they can orientate themselves by chart.

They must have figured it out for themselves by this time, being navigators, what it was that happened. Maybe they've figured out that there should be one other point on the globe, too, where the relative position hadn't altered. Which had turned upon a pivot, like them, in the sudden overset. And maybe they are sailing around Good Hope now, having found Suez sand-filled and desolate. Heading for New York Bay across the South Atlantic by the great circle course. Maybe they'll be here soon.

But just to let them know what happened, if they haven't figured it, I've written this report, and Officer Bulger and the girls are making ten thousand carbon copies to put in all the coke bottles we've been able to collect from their rooms and my blackstrap bottles from the basement, to throw into the sea.

I'm glad this has reached you, whoever reads this. You have the address. The mat is out, the door is always open. And welcome, brothers. ● ● ●

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

crank at one end and a sort of detachable funnel at the other. There were portholes here and there and an electric outlet. "But how could it take off, trailing a wire behind it?"

A Matter of Doubt

"I don't know myself what this one is," she admitted, chewing on a thumbnail.

"A sausage stuffer?" we suggested.

We studied it from every angle, but the only intelligence we could adduce was that it had been made in and imported from Germany. Maybe a V-2?

The salesgirl finally had to call the section manager, who, praise Allah knew what the gimmick was, probably from a vacation trip to Germany in her student days. It was a coffee roaster, for them as objects to total strangers roasting their coffee and insist upon doing it themselves at home.

Fearsome Device

Then there was the prize of her collection, a coffee maker imported from Italy.

Take one of the Long Island railroad's defunct steam locomotives, cross it with a Kentucky mountaineer's moonshine still, and you have something vaguely resembling this fearsome device.

She showed us how it worked. "First there's the boiler. You unscrew these pressure lugs and take off the top and put the water in here. Then you put it over the stove to heat. The water boils and the steam goes through this gooseneck down to here. Here you take this little pot off . . . if you can get it off . . ." it came free with only a short struggle ". . . you put coffee in it and try to get it back on." This was a sterner struggle. "It only takes twenty minutes to get back on—makes you late to work but it's worth it if you don't burn yourself on the steam shooting out of the boiler—there, got it! Now the steam trickles down through the coffee. Quick as a bunny you shove your cup under and presto, fresh coffee dripped right into your cup and only twice as much work as the regular way. Isn't that a steal at twenty-seven bucks?"

We agreed it was indeed and stumbled out filled with misgivings. Could this be a blueprint of our brave new world? Maybe it's just as well we weren't born two hundred years from now.

THIS being the post-mortem issue on the August number, we were prepared to print both the accolades and the vituperation called forth by THE LOVERS. But in all the millions of letters received, only about three readers disliked or were otherwise disgruntled about the story. At the risk of seeming pedantic, we rise to say this augers well for the maturation of science fiction.

NO OFFENSE

by Rory M. Faulkner

Dear Mr. Mines: May I offer my heartiest congratulations on the August issue of STARTLING STORIES? I want to tell you how I appreciate your courage and your editorial acumen in giving us Farmer's wonderful story, THE LOVERS. In my useless opinion, this will become the top science-fiction story of the year.

In spite of all the prattling of Gold and Boucher about their intentions to use only adult s-f, I doubt if either of these editors would have dared use this story. It breaks every known taboo in science-fiction so far, and yet this is done in a way to give absolutely no offense—not even to an old gramma like me! Farmer never exceeded the bounds of good taste in his presentation of the facts of life, and in addition he told a moving story beautifully and sympathetically.

I read it a second time, and in this second reading was struck by the sheer craftsmanship this young man displays. By mere allusions, and the use of terms that were self-explanatory to the thoughtful reader, he built up a clear picture of a hierarchy of future government; we were not bored by tedious exposition of the subject. The man will go far.

Bergey, who used to be anathema to me when he drew his open-mouthed, vacant-eyed babes, has utterly redeemed himself by this cover. It is a beauty, and what's more, he has captured the spirit of the story in the figures of the two lovers looking so perfectly delighted with each other, and the rather sinister hint conveyed by the alien brats.

Bergey must have liked this story very much himself. By the way, he is drawing some rather gorgeous men lately—in response to the wild mating calls of fem fans who have been demanding this?

The whole new make-up of Startling is a tremendous improvement—the new title lay-out, the removal of any printing on the cover illo—all this

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makes an old favorite look very high-kless indeed!

Your lead story has so overshadowed the others that I have neglected to mention them. Of the rest, I like that mood story, NOISE, best, with Bixby's PAGE AND PLAYERS second.

I like your reader's page, and please do not fall into the temptation to print only the letters dealing with some abstruse technical problem that interests only a small percentage of the readers, as one of your competitors has the habit of doing. One wonders if this ed slants his material entirely toward Einstein and Oppenheimer and neglects the general public too much!

Tell the little Pushkin I enjoyed his poem—it shows a lot of promise, and he must keep on writing.

Again, congratulations on a swell issue, and keep it up!—*164 Geneva Place, Covina, Cal.*

We're real happy you not only responded to the story, but you caught the meaning and mood of the cover perhaps better than anyone else. Not so many interpreted the baby wogglebugs happily playing down there as a sinister touch, but that's exactly what it was meant to be. And let's hope your opinions aren't as useless as you put it. How can they be when they agree with us?

For a military analysis we take you now to . . .

WASP, MISSILE TYPE

by John P. Conlon, WO/JG

Dear Sir: I saw your statements anent "The Lovers" in your latest issue, and it seems to me that there is much to what you said. I am not going to say much about the literary, biological, moral, or religious aspects of the story. I am certain you will hear from everyone but HST.

And one thing I am sure of, If Edwin Sigler reads your mag these days, there will be a letter arriving at your office some day, no doubt engraved upon an asbestos shingle, due to the warmth of contents.

The story had a very well worked out foreign background, extra terrestrial, or what ever else you say The "beetlejuice" part was amusing. If Farmer got his idea from the popular phrases for drinks, I hope he never takes up the title of "Old Panther Sweat," to tone it down a bit.

As a half-baked authority on weapons, the guided insect swarm strikes me as the neatest touch since the medieval Czechs fired two thousand cartloads of manure over the walls of Karolstein during the Hussite Wars. There are many stingers and biters here which do quite well, and bugs bred for biting power would back anything off the map that grows wild here. There is at least one South American wasp which can kill if three of them sting a person and the black widow spider is apt to make those who don't die heartily wish they had. Picture a "Wasp, Missile Type, M222" or such, about the size of a humming bird and with a sting something like an old-fashioned hoss doctor's syringe. *YOU* picture it, the prospect scares me, like the Hungarian I used to know who told recruits vampire stories so good he scared hell out of himself once.

Some time back I went to Aberdeen Proving Ground for a course on my specialty. They have a foreign material museum there which includes a lot of Jerry ordnance of conventional and outlandish design alike. Amongst this gear was a batch of V-2 gear, including the whole missile, and cutaways to show the motor arrangements, etc. Then they had other missiles, "Wasserfall," Schmetterling," Rheintochter," and a V-1. I do not know how the others were, but I can testify that the V-1 was a fine scare weepin. It is quite a thrill to sit in the midst of a bomb dump and wonder if one of them is going to land in a stack of 500 pounders. If all that effort had been spent on the manufacture of space rockets, I wonder how far the Krauts would have gone. And I wonder how the Russians are doing. I would bet that they are very fond of guided missiles. It takes lots to make them, but at least they don't get wild ideas and desert to us vile Yankees. Unless, of course, they are proceeding on Marxian lines to try and make things Marx never thought of.—*737th Ordnance Company, 37th Inf. Division, Camp Polk, La.*

It scares us too. Someone a little stronger on history than we probably could dig up some authentic cases of armies routed by insects—bet Caesar had tough going in the marshes of the Nile against mosquitoes. And how many armies have been decimated by typhus carried by lice, bubonic plague spread by fleas, yellow fever and malaria donated by mosquitoes?

HEART AND WONDER

by Forrest J. Ackerman

Dear Sam and Jerry: I suppose it may have been 10 years since I last wrote a letter to STARTLING STORIES, altho I have a mint collection from the first issue. Credit Philip José Farmer's 50,000 fascinating words for the once-in-a-decade communiqué. THE LOVERS was a truly startling story to discover in your pages, and augurs well for STARTLING's approaching adulthood.

Fourteen years ago your basic appeal was frankly blood and thunder: with sincere, outspoken science fiction like THE LOVERS the approach gratifyingly grows to heart and wonder, mind and emotions. I applaud this trend, and at the most recent meeting (the 774th) of our Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, fans and pros present echoed my sentiments.

I like your new trend in covers, and have long admired the superior interior work of Virgil Finlay. I have a feeling that STARTLING is moving into the Big League now, and have great expectations for the future. Some day may I pick up an issue with a Bonestell cover and a Table of Contents presenting Heinlein, Sturgeon, Eric Frank Russell, Kris Neville, Damon Knight, Fritz Leiber, Wm. Temple, Mark Clifton, Lewis Padgett and Philip Farmer. That will be THE DAY.—*915 S. Sherbourne Dr., Los Angeles 35, Cal.*

Forrest Ackerman, known to his intimates

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as 4e, has long rejoiced in the title of U.S. fan No. 1. Besides his fan activities he is a professional literary agent specializing in stf and represents van Vogt among other stf writers. His table of contents is quite a groaning board, though we think it only fair to point out that nearly all the authors he mentions have appeared at one time or other in the pages of SS. Would be fun seeing them all together, huh?

FURTHER SACRILEGE

by John R. Phillips

Dear Sam: I open with a trumpet fanfare for Farmer's THE LOVERS, which was every bit as good as you blurbed it to be. This story caps a series of improvements in good old SS that have thrust it head and shoulders above the other pulps.

THE HOUR OF THE MORTALS—readable. Seems strange seeing KFC without Draco Manning.

PAGE AND PLAYER—Aha! Cawcha this time! A little error or inconsistency. On page 112 the Cronies are not "thank heaven, able to read earth minds," while on page 124, column 2, "Lin heard Miles think. . . ."

Not content with merely executing Captain Future, Mr. Ye Ed (salaam) now has to perform a further sacrilege by printing MAJOR VENTURE AND THE MISSING SATELLITE. As of now I cast my lot with that hardy sect of conspirators, foully persecuted but still fighting, who shout, "We want Captain Future!"

FAMILY TREE—average—the kind of thing that Murray Leinster writes.

NOISE—a pretty little thing. (I can hear the war dance of the Fantasy-Haters led by Wally Weber beginning in the distance.)

HERE LIES MINES—no, no, I mean BOTTLETHWAITE—well, let's not waste words on this one.

As regards the "Prediction"—possibly the first spacemen will be too dead to develop occupational stigmas. Probably the main stigma will be the habit of setting things down in mid-air while not in free fall. Cr-r-unch!—*600 Strath Haven Ave., Swarthmore, Penn.*

P.S. A good Bergey on the cover! Another blow against the BERGEY BAITERS.

Ahem, sorry to intrude upon your benign and self-congratulatory mood, but you missed something in PAGE AND PLAYER. The whole point there was that the Cronies were a heap more subtle than even their boss realized; that they led him to think they couldn't read minds, but they doggone well could all the time. On page 124, column 2, paragraph two quote: "Earthmen would, he was sure, resent the fact that their minds were accessible to Cronies. That was why they didn't know it." See? Jerry Bixby, who wrote PAGE AND PLAYER and also "Prediction," was much amused by your example of spaceman's occupational hazard. That should make you feel good, bringing some laughter into an otherwise miserable life.

TERRIFIC FUTURE

by Denny Zeitlin

Dear Sam: I am absolutely flabbergasted! THE LOVERS was more than you said it would be! This was positively the greatest story I've seen in any of your mags for the past four years. Hats off to Farmer!

Please keep the Crossen coming, his PASSPORT TO PAX was wonderful!

Who writes "What's New in Science?" Something's wrong with someone's astronomy—when did Jupiter acquire her twelfth moon? Then to top it off, later on in the ish, Blish states that Jupiter has eleven moons—something's wrong somewhere. (June—TWS.)

The other day I happened to pick up Pratt's "The Seed From Space"—what the H— has happened to HIM? Maybe he oughta go back to the Army. (Or was it the Navy?)

With a Bergey like Rembrandt, and a Schomburg like Bonestell, and an editor who REALLY knows what he's doing, SS, TWS, and FSM have a terrific future. Who knows, I might even scrounge up three bucks for a subscription!!??—*200 Oak Knoll, Highland Park, Illinois.*

This kid skips from SS to TWS and from issue to issue without even signalling for a left turn. The "What's New In Science" he's talking about appeared in the June TWS. Jupiter's twelfth moon was discovered by astronomer Richardson after the Blish articles were written. Blish knew about it, of course, but didn't think it was earth-shaking enough to call to our attention. That "What's New In Science" however is done just before the magazine goes to press, so had the latest findings and that's how you got your little old discrepancy. Make you happy?

BEMS AND EMOTIONS

by Sid Sullivan

Mines dear Sam: Can Farmer keep it up? If so, in him you have an author to outshine every other in this field, a Hemingway of science-fiction. Hand him the unusual themes, the novel ideas that the other authors are afraid to touch. Who else has ever taken the controversial subject of intercourse and reproduction between two totally different species of beings and woven such a technically superb story around it? How few have given their bems such sincere emotional values as well as history and culture that is well described, yet remains subordinate to the theme itself. All too often the reasons for the men and bems being what they are and where they are are slapped in like misplaced footnotes Not so in THE LOVERS. I hope to find that Mr. Farmer is an exceedingly prolific writer. THE LOVERS will not seem creaky and

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ancient in ten years for although terms and phrases may have changed by then, people and their emotions and motives won't.

Now that the ice has been broken, there are many other neglected ideas I would like to see stf stories written around. Religion, for instance. Not the blonde priestess stone idol sort, but the monotheistic kind we have now and how it would be practiced on alien planets. Surely homo sapiens would not be the only intelligent creature to conceive of but one God. Or shall Earthmen be Pauls to Rigel II's pagan Romans? Why not? We have had explorers to Africa and to Mazdan, colonists to North America and to Goran III. The link between them, the missionaries, has been utterly ignored in science fiction. And I'm not debating in TWS's theology class Just seems like good story material to me.

Condolences to Willie Miller. Bear your STARTLING STORIES like a flaming torch and maybe your buddies will see the light and drop their funny books. Or are they still working on Peter Rabbit? They should understand your appreciation for Finlay's women at least.—*Lexington Park, Md.*

Ye ed retains a soft spot in his head for Peter **Rabbit** and Ol' Mother West Wind (for grown **men?**) but has learned without too much difficulty to appreciate Finlay's women.

We've bought a novelet from Farmer called MOTHER, with an even more unusual theme than THE LOVERS. It's scheduled for TWS, December. This is the last, I think, of his biological stories except for a sequel to THE LOVERS now being planned and a new novel tentatively titled A BEAST OF THE FIELDS which we haven't seen yet, so can't tell you anything about it. But he seems profilic enough, which should make you happy.

ACID AND ETCHINGS

by Robert E. Briney

Dear Sam: Cometh an opinion: THE LOVERS is one of the three greatest science fiction novels published in magazines in the last ten years. I doubt if the theme of sex has ever received such a mature treatment before in the magazines. The story involves a number of themes that are by no means new, but the treatment and quality of the writing were phenomenal. I can imagine the hornets' nest the story will stir up, too . . . All I can say is a hearty congratulations, and thank you for printing it.

The picture which the novel gives of the future society of the Earth should draw no little comment, too. It has been a long time since I've seen such a biting, acid-etched portrait of a race's decline. The whole thing is so painstakingly and completely developed that it makes one uncomfortable to read it.

Of the novelets, THE HOUR OF THE MORTALS is by far the best. That Crossen sure can write! Besides being a top-notch humorist, he is a satirist of the first water, and his straight sf is swell too. Of the short stories, Jack Vance's NOISE takes the prize. I doubt that Vance could write a bad story if he tried.

Might as well get in some words about the TWS of the same month, while I'm at it. By far the best is CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS. Even better than its predecessor. The two Jean Parlier stories rank as two of the most enjoyable stories you have published in years. Ed Hamilton's return with LORDS OF THE MORNING is welcome, too; the good old style Hamilton is back, he who combines good ideas with solid adventure and exciting writing. His best in this vein was THE VALLEY OF CREATION, a novel I will never forget. Bixby's short was the best of the shorter pieces. A man of many talents, that one—cartoonist, humorist, fanreviewer, and author. And doubtless other accomplishments . . .

Like the new format on the cover. You finally got rid of the blurbs that used to plaster the paintings, for which praise Allah. Your covers always were worth looking at, and now they *can* be looked at. Bergey is still the best, despite the fact that he seems to have lost his flair for bright colors, which was one of the main reasons I liked him, even in his bem-fem days. Schomburg really turns out some beauties, and Emsh is coming along steadily, too.

You want I should tell you the best stories you have published this year? Very well, herewith a little list, covering both SS and TWS. VULCAN'S DOLLS, THE WELL OF THE WORLDS, THE LOVERS, THE LAST DAYS OF SHANDAKOR, THE SHADOWS, PASSPORT TO PAX, THE GNOME'S GNEISS, CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS, NOISE, THE AMBASSADORS, and SORT OF LIKE A FLOWER. None of the novels or novelets have been lower than average, save the sorry attempts of Fletcher Pratt to make like a writer; he has done some marvelous stuff before, but wotinell happened to him lately?

SS and TWS are about the only magazines that I still read faithfully and regularly. I get the others still, but college leaves me time only to read the one or two that give me the most enjoyment and consistent pleasure—SS and TWS fill that bill perfectly.—*561 West Western Avenue, Muskegon, Michigan.*

No point in our disagreeing with you, is there? We've already had our say about THE LOVERS. So long as you are so impressed with the new Hamilton, keep a sharp eye on TWS where, most likely in the December ish, will appear a story of his called WHAT'S IT LIKE OUT THERE? which I rather suspect will hit some of you about as hard as THE LOVERS did. A brand-new Hamilton.

A SPLENDID NOISE

by (Mrs.) Barbara Harris

Dear Mr. Mines: A plaudit on the August issue of SS—specifically on the cover format and the lead story.

The border on the cover manages to restrain the title (startling, to say the least) almost to the point of respectability. At a casual glance this

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issue might pass for a sensible magazine like "Insane Love" or "Turgid Confessions."

Now, tell me why a young matron can read flowery love, westerns or detective mags without inducing a tremor in anyone's eyebrow, but the combination of baby and science fiction elicits naught but horror and perturbation? Evidently I am presumed to be raising the next generation of BEMS. (H'm, that brat does look a little odd of late. . .)

You have a justifiable brag due on THE LOVERS. No music is dearer to mine ears than the sound of crashing literary barriers and the one labeled miscegenation made a splendid noise. Further, this story has all the elements of human conflict that go to make up my favorite brand of literature. Ah, Pathos! (Did I hear a cynic snarl "Bathos?")

One more thing. Are there any science fiction clubs or Dens of Fens in Buffalo or vicinity?—*1251 Kenmore Ave., Kenmore, New York.*

Once upon a time I knew an avid pulp fan who devoured westerns and detectives faster than they came off the presses. So as a noble experiment, I slipped a copy of your favorite mag into his hellish brew. The result was a small atomic explosion. "Little green men onna moon!" he snarled at me. "You gotta be boi-soik to read 'at stuff!"

We've been boi-soik ever since.

Keep an eye on the baby.

PASS THE DDT

by J. T. Oliver

Dear Mr. Mines: THE LOVERS was a fine, realistic story. Especially liked the tragic ending. After all, it's hard enough to get along with girls of your own kind—how could you expect to be happy with a woman who was completely different in mentality and physical make-up? Even if she had confided in him, how do you think it would have worked out, with him growing old and impotent and she still young and full of life? A sad thing, of course, but it goes to show what will happen when the aliens come, and we start marrying them. Even with the best of intentions, it won't work out. I found Jeanette's kind quite repulsive when Farmer explained them fully. I cannot imagine myself marrying a creature like that. I'm not religious at all, so my objections to such a union are not based on church code, but on, I suppose, *instinct*. It was a good story, though. The insects who pretended to be people were good. I'd like to see another story by Farmer.

MAJOR VENTURE was an excellent parody. Let's have more like it. Glad to see Dee coming up next ish. He recently had a yarn in the ATLANTA JOURNAL MAG. Also looking forward to Damon Knight.—*315 27th St., Columbus, Ga.*

Anyone who's ever tried to go on a picnic in July can be pardoned for having some slight bias against insects, but JT you'd have had to be equipped with X-ray eyes to spot anything insectal about Jeannette. She was a warm-blooded creature and, to the eye, very mammalian. Nothing caterpillar about her at all. Well, no accounting for tastes.

DIFFIDENT DODDERING

by Victor R. Juengel

Dear Sir; The diverting, delightfully different description of dalliance dealing with a daring, dashing, dauntless, debonair dastard dawdling, dispensing drink and deflowering a dainty, delicate, dreamy damsel leaves one decidedly daft, deranged with delusions and a dementia driving one to drain the demijohn.

Despicably devoted to drunkenness, the deliciously delectable dove of damask dermis diaphanously dressed in decorative, dangling decollete deserves better than to descend to a detestable, depraved dipsomaniac.

The droll deviations of dead dogma deceitfully depicted by a decrepit, doddering, despotic dragon whose distressing diatribes are destined to bring despair and disillusionment to the dapper dandy deliberately designing despicably devilish debauchery with the dazzling, desirable dear must be deplored as desecrative and the depressing dismal dotard, often derelict in duty, deposed, decried, disparaged and drastically dealt disintegration, death and decomposition.

The doleful debacle depicted by the dismally disappointing denouement is demanded by the deadly duplicity of the devasting darling, for who desires dozens upon dozens of daughters? There is no dearth of distaff descendants.

Doubtless you delivered many a dented denarius to the domicile of the deft delineator—a simple deduction. Dandelions to you for the drooly, ducky discovery for it is distinctly a definite departure demanding a dispatch to the deceased Darwin to deal with decalcifying dryads. It would be disastrous to leave us discontented, dissatisfied, desolate and despondent by a dampening discontinuance of such daydreams.

Let others demur, disapprove and dislike—even despise the deportment and deeds of the duo, deeming the distracting demoiselle a decadent demimondaine lacking decorum and decency. I declare in defense the dawn of a new day is denoted. I defy debate to damper my dander and would be doomed to deep dismay if some diligent dabbler did not duplicate despite defects without undue delay.—*2327 Vinewood, Detroit 16, Michigan.*

The "d" on our typewriter just melted and dripped off on the floor. Which alone deters us from doing dirt to dabbler Juengel and his droll dodderings. We throw you to the fen.

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

by James Fenimore Cooper, Jr.

Dear Sam: I've been reading SF for ten years (I'm 19 now, draw your own conclusions as to when I started), but in all that time I have never read any issue of any mag that presented a wider variety of good material than the August ish of SS. In order of appearance—

The cover, sigh. It speaks for itself. It isn't

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typical Bergey style, it isn't typical SS style, but it certainly is true art in the science-fiction style.

My feelings regarding THE LOVERS were expressed better than I could do it in your blurb and editorial. Let's hope Farmer does not turn out to be a "one-shot" writer. The cause of SF could be immeasurably furthered by his efforts.

THE HOUR OF THE MORTALS and PAGE AND PLAYER were not classics by any standard, but were at least readable, and after all, what can we expect for two bits?

Just a second while I get my courage up. Okay, now I'm ready. I think MAJOR VENTURE AND THE MISSING SATELLITE was the greatest humorous SF story ever written! No, Moskowitz. Not the disintegrator! No . . . aaarrgh . . . . He missed.

FAMILY TREE was substandard, as was HERE LIES BOTTLETHWAITE, but the remaining story more than made up for both. The story referred to, NOISE, defies analysis. It contained no plot to speak of, no hero, no villain, no love angle, no space battle, and no BEM. And yet the story itself will probably become one of the most-liked in the long history of science-fiction.

And then again, maybe I'm crazy, and it was really a lousy issue. But I don't think so.

The second reason for writing this is to see if it is possible to form some sort of fan club at the Pennsylvania State College. We might even try to get out a fanmag if enough intrest is shown. If anyone in the college or vicinity is even slightly interested, please contact me and we'll see what we can do.

And a word of praise for you, Sam. You started off as good as Merwin; lately you're surpassing him. Keep it up.—*443 West Beaver Avenue, State College, Pennsylvania.*

P.S. No kiddin', I really did like it!

Ever since publishing MAJOR VENTURE, we've been looking both ways when crossing the street, avoiding ladders and high buildings and getting Jerry to open the mail first. But a significant silence issues from Moskowitz. No storm clouds gather in the direction of Three Bridges. He is probably planning the most colossal counter-blow of all time. . . .

As for you, Uncas, congratulations on your good taste. You agree with us, doncha?

INSULT TO IGNOMINY

by Craig Sutton

Dear Sam: Egad, man! After finishing that opus by Fritch, I couldn't restrain myself any longer. Not a moment! That takeoff on Captain Future is one of the best satires I've ever seen in SF. Really, Sam, you've got to get more on that line. You shouldn't have included it in the same ish with *The Lovers—Major Venture and the Missing Satellite* simply stole the whole show. I thought *The Lovers* was good, yeah . . . but Mr. Fritch takes the blue ribbon.

When I was through reading that fabulous bit of authoreal genius, I began to think. (No snide remarks, please.) Sam Galileo had, as Mr. Fritch states, a most remarkable father. Most remarkable. Wasn't Sam's dad the guy who is generally credited with the creation of the Solar System? Sure he is. For those of you who are yet uneducated as to the theories of the creation of this solar system, I shall explain, though to most of we erudite SF fans, no explanation is necessary.

Theocrastus Q. Galileo, father of Samuel Galileo, was undoubtedly one of the greatest men of all human history. His degrees, among others, are (for some say he is still with us): Ph.D., Sc.D., B.E.M., S.N.A.F.U., F.U.B.A.R., V.I.P. It seems that Theo, one day, had attended a banquet given in his honor at the house of Aita Klak Kurfu, the well known Sirian inventor. Well, they all had a few rounds, and, right then and there, Theo got into an inventive mood. Somebody must have given him an idea, for he claimed that he was about to invent a completely new and revolutionary electric fan. Somewhere along the line, though, (and undoubtedly with the aid of the powerful atomic sloe ginger-ale fizzes that he had partaken of earlier in the evening) he must have mixed up a couple of sciences, for the result was not an electric fan, but a totally new and different type of fan, which he explained as being not run on electric power at all, but instead could be hooked up with a semi-boloid psychofrantic bovallipus snalligaster (in conjunction, of course, with the drawn panendermic girdlespring which varishes the noffer bunions) to produce a more powerful type of fan. The blades were capable of splitting hairs, among other things, but Theo was determined not to use this fan for such a minor purpose. Instead, he faked complete, utter drunkenness (some will say that it was a quite real binge) and hid under the dining-room table. As soon as all the guests had left, he emerged from his temporary place of occupance and jumped into his own private little space-ship.

Theo took his new fan out into deep space near a new sun which he named then and there "Sol"—why, nobody knows for sure, and no theories have ever been advanced upon that subject. But he then took out his innovation, the pilfrometric neo-fan, and sent it spinning out into space. The ship followed at a safe distance.

Theo then fulfilled his lifelong desire; the thing he had been living for the whole of his life. Out of his pocket he took an ostrich egg, and, approaching the pilfrometric neo-fan slowly and cautiously, he wound up with all his force and threw the egg squarely into the center of the fan!

However, he had not counted on one thing; somehow, he had also got his forces mixed up along with his sciences while inventing his fan, and some of these forces were imparted to the egg when it hit. The pieces of egg flew into nine directions, and began to expand! How this inconceivable event managed to take place has never been understood; some say that Theo was trying from the beginning to make a new kind of hangover-powder, and that it had had the opposite effect upon the egg, and, rather than curing hangovers, it gave hangovers to the pieces of egg, causing them to swell, just as anyone's head does on the morning after.

Well, at any rate, the rest is history. Theo got out of there as fast as he possibly could. After a while, the effect of the hangover ceased, but the

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pieces of egg never shrunk back to their original size.

When Theo got home, of course, he went into a fit of hysterics at the final achievement of his life: that of throwing an egg into a fan. And not an ordinary egg or an ordinary fan, either! When Theocrastus Q. Galileo did something, he did it big! The cosmos rang with his laughter for years, and the vibrations of this tremendous burst of laughter caused the massaging that made the first form of life appear on Earth.

This theory has never been put out before, as far as I know. After all, what ignominy the thought that we sprung from an egg thrown into a fan! However, the truth will out, and we are now sufficiently grown up to face facts. It's a good thing that Theo didn't like egg in his beer, ain't it?

That does it. Now we'd both better watch our mail. Just don't open any packages postmarked New Jersey.

HUNCH

by Anthony De Luna

Dear Mr. Mines: I had to get this letter written before my feelings about THE LOVERS left me if they ever would. It was truly a fine and moving story on a subject in science fiction which I knew would inevitably come to be printed.

If Philip José Farmer is Philip José Farmer, then there is no doubt in my mind that (he?) is the find of the year, but after finishing the story I couldn't help but feel that the author's style was all too familiar. If my hunch is correct, he is not a new writer, but an old writer with a new name. After careful consideration I have boiled down my assumption to one person. I will not mention the writer's name since I do not wish to get involved any deeper. In the event that I am wrong, well, THE LOVERS was a good story and Philip José Farmer will definitely go places.—*364 East 123rd St., New York, 35, N.Y.*

Haven't the foggiest idea whom you have in mind, though we suspect it may be a woman writer from your questioning the "he" up above. But in any case, Farmer is Farmer, not Brackett or St. Clair. He's young, he's a recent graduate of Bradley University (1950), he is married and has two children, he works in a steel mill in Peoria, his wife is a lab technician, a newspaper picture he sent me in connection with some local publicity on THE LOVERS makes him look like a cherubic Jackie Cooper (that dates me, huh?). Also I can't see the resemblance in style you mention.

ANATOMICAL DETAILS

by Daniel Zoll

Dear Sam: Fascinated as I usually was at the Thrilling Twins letter columns, I shall yield to reason and make this short. I myself only read the editor's comments on letters now, if interesting I consider the letter that inspired them. The aborted equating of beauty and sex appeal in one of the recent SS's reminded me of an old observation we used to toss around. You and my fellow fen are welcome to it, you may toss it in any direction you please.

The anatomical details of female anatomy most admired by 20th Century western civilization males, hips and breasts, are just those regions most concerned with the ultimate product of sexual relations. The most admired hips are those best designed for child bearing and the most admired breasts are those apparently best designed for the nourishment of infants. Functionalism and beauty? Now your Ubangis, Sam, who as a "primitive" tribe admire various elongations and distortions of essential non-functional (in this sense) elements, show what we might say are perverted tastes. Perversions are supposedly found only in sophisticated cultures.

This thing can take off in various directions from a comparison of Rubens to Cranach, to whether simplicity and directness are ultimate goals of a culture. I offer it for what it is worth.

Consider me as having forward the usual favorable type amenities re your elevation to the previous Sam's chair. My last letter was in '48, I think, at this rate my next will be in '56.—*63 Beavonfield Rd., Brookline, Mass.*

P.S. I abhor puns on my last name. Sam I did it for a title to my last letter—you'll notice he's no longer editor, let Sam II beware.

This theory of yours bears many earmarks of being home-made and I wish more space were available to kick it around. I doubt that our standards of sexual beauty are inspired by their sheer functionalism. An unusually wide pelvic region in a female should be more suited for child-bearing than a narrow one, yet we do not judge the shapeliness by the breadth alone. We have evolved a certain standard of shapeliness which at any given moment is the criterion—it changes with periods as you have noticed. As far as the specific regions which interest males, this is functional in the sexual rather than the child-bearing sense. It is obvious that woman's erogenous zones perform dual functions and this is Nature's little joke on the irresponsible male. He finds himself with children to support.

There's the famous story about the pussycat trundling down the street with eight little kittens following her, who is accousted by a tomcat, greeting her thusly: "Hya, honey!" To which she replied, "Don't you honey me, you brute! You said we were only wrestling!"

QUICK HENRY, THE CHLOROPHYLL

by Ronald Voigt

Dear Chordate Arthropod (Dunno what it means but it sounds good.): Being a fan of SS every

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since the days of Sargeant Saturn (may he rest in Xeno), I've finally built up nerve (or verve) to compose (hah!) this letter (finis.)

Some of the fen might think "The Lovers" was "for the bugs", but I think it was "shib." It seems that not only must we worry about our best friend being a Martian, now we worry about her/him being the cousin of a potato bug.

All that I can say about the "Page and Player" is:

The Crony
So bony
Should be buried
With Jerry (So it don't rhyme good; ikkk!)

I almost popped my eyes out on stalks (eyestalks: suttle?), trying to find the painter's name on the cuv pic. I quickly turned to the contents page. There was the name, in Bem chartreuse: Bergey! So, in true fen tradition, I found something wrong with the cover. If the Ozagenians didn't have air travel, why is bug-chile playing with a model space ship in the background?

On the whole, this issue was one of the best. Let's have more like it. (Oh yeah, handle gently. Erasure marks weakened the paper.)—*3836 Kennerly, St. Louis, Mo.*

Ho, Jerry just stuck his pointed nose in here, clamoring to reply to Voigt. So here it is:

Sticks and stones
Will break my bones;
But Cronies bring dollars,
So critical hollers
And scurrilous words
Won't hoit
Me,
Voigt.
See?

We quit.

AS ADVERTISED

by Emily Holveck

Dear Editor: Ignoring your advice, I read the whole editorial on THE LOVERS before I read the story. Having been fooled many times before by big build-ups, I started reading the story fully prepared for disappointment. Now I can only use an outdated expression to tell you how good it was—it was out of this world.

The imagination shown was magnificent. How did he do it? Just when I thought I knew what was coming, Farmer twisted it into something else. There was no forecasting what was going to happen at any time.

I hope all your writers will soon be putting out such outstanding stories. As for Farmer, he has good color, suspense, understanding and food for thought in his story. I hope he continues. Give my regards to all your authors. They deserve all the thanks they get.—*211 So. 3rd St., Steubenville, Ohio.*

Now that we've lulled your suspicions, watch out for the next build-up—no, we didn't mean it. We're just naturally honest, that's all.

DOMESTIC STRIFE

by Ray Nelson

Dear Sir: I ought to sue you and Philip José Farmer for alienation of affections. THE LOVERS caused a three hour argument between my wife and myself, I holding that Jeannette's "relatives" were a menace to the human race and ought to be wiped out, and she holding that the "relatives" were just as much people as we were and that my attitude was just "race prejudice."

But I won't sue, because the very fact that a mere story can cause such controversy is a point in its favor. We did agree on one thing, that it was a pretty darn good story. The treatment of sex was wonderful. I was expecting a True Love tale of the Doomed Love of a Spaceman for a Beautiful Alien Girl and instead I get . . . an insect that I rather suspect is nibbling away at the foundations of our Late Pseudo-Christian civilization. Bully for you.

The other stories . . . Must I?

Enough to say Page and Player was fair, "Bottlethwaite" readable . . . the rest . . . Ghu's gizzard, Sam, if this kind of stuff is getting by, darned if I won't send you some of MY fanzine rejects.—*4736 Drexel Blvd., Chicago, Ill.*

P.S. Bergey has improved so much it's hard to believe he's the same man. He still has a ways to go, tho. That cover spaceship looks like it's about to inflict grave damage to ye hero's dome, and I don't see the point of portraying the wogs as little children.

We were just about to take your ears off for that crack about the spaceship conking the hero when we discovered the letter from your wife, so figuring she can always do a better hatchet job on you than we can, we step willingly aside for

THE DISTAFF SIDE

by Perdita Anne Nelson

Dear Sam: This, sir, is the first letter I've been moved to write to a promag in quite some time and it's all because of THE LOVERS. (And only because of THE LOVERS, I might add.) That was a fascinating and wholly unexpected story. Being always sceptical of rhapsodic editorials, I made no special haste to get around to reading the longest story in the issue since I usually do leave them for last. When I finally got to it, I was caught entirely off guard by actually having it be a darn good story. Congratulations on THE LOVERS.

As for the rest of the stories, I can only say that I didn't actively dislike them. All except for PAGE AND PLAYER which I did like rather well. As for the other so-called "novelet, THE HOUR OF THE MORTALS. It rather had the air of emulating one of my cat's pet tricks—that is, reversing itself in midair.

Since I am one of the people who used to turn ol' Bergey's covers out of sight while in public, I can hardly help but laud your new cover policy. However, I was a little annoyed to see you jumping on the same bandwagon with other mags who

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have been stricken with a certain cover format fever. While I like the cover scenes better now, I liked the old format better.

Incidentally, you might be amused to know that either SS or TWS (I forget which) was indirectly responsible for my getting into the marital state. After reading stf for a long time, I one day read the letter column and thereby discovered fandom. I sent in a letter to the column and through it was contacted by the Detroit Science Fantasy League which I joined and became an active member of. Before I knew it, all my friends were fans and my other social contacts had sort of melted away. Not that I was sorry. I've never met a nicer bunch of crackpots than most fans. However, after a couple of years of knocking around Detroit with these maniacs, I met a certain BNF from Cadillac, Michigan named Ray Nelson and a few months later we were married. And all this from a letter in one or the other, SS or TWS—*4736 Drexel Blvd., Chicago 15, Ill.*

Thinking about the trouble you can get into just reading a science-fiction mag gives us goosepimples.

A word on the covers. Two considerations governed our change. One, a more modern format; two, framing the picture so as to get the lettering off it, which often murders the picture. There was no attempt to get in line with a trend, nor imitate anyone else's cover. I don't think SS is really much like the others anyway. Thanks for writing.

POSTULATES AND PROFESSIONALS

by Philip N. Bridges

Dear Sir: While it is still fresh in my mind I want to express my appreciation for that fine story, THE LOVERS, which you presented in the August issue of STARTLING.

I was very glad to see a biological story, a rarity in itself, so ably presented. The writing was good, and the technicalities excellent. As a former geneticist myself, I can say that there were no scientific errors obvious to me, and that there was nothing impossible in the biological postulates of the story. For once we have a story whose plot depends on the science involved; not just a space opera. A fine story!—*2426 19th St., N.W., Washington 9, D.C.*

Not too many good biological stories have been printed; the type is obviously more difficult to make glamorous than space opera, which is almost foolproof in the hands of a competent writer. It requires more imagination to work with biological themes. Approval from a pro is highest praise indeed.

STF STARVED

by Carol McKinney

Dear SM: I finally got a copy of SS after nearly a year without either SS or TWS, and things have really changed, it seems!

The cover was wonderful, super, scintillating. Yes, it was the August 1952 issue, featuring THE LOVERS! The story was as good as you said it would be, a sf story with a new twist. Probably a lot of readers will cuss and discuss the unhappy ending, pro and con, but to me it made no difference. Let's have another story soon by Farmer. (I do hope after all is said and done he isn't a pen-name?!)

Will you please *do* something about the lack of sf mags in small towns, especially *this* one, at least in regard to SS and TWS? I can't bear to think of going another whole year before I get another copy!

(Perhaps in some big city where you can't see the stands for the sf mags there lives some kind-hearted reader who wouldn't mind parting with some now and then?)

Aside from Major Venture the mag was wonderful, super, scintillating- is it going to be like that from now on? Please, pulsease, SM, *do* something about getting SS and TWS on the stands here in Provo! The few mags on sale here, (just to be nice today I won't mention their names) are gone almost as soon as they hit the stands.

Joe Gibson (Calling Jersey City): I give up, too—can't find Bergey's name on the cover. Mr. SMines, will you use your third eye and tell me where it is, too?

Ok, I'll go peacefully now. (Before I do, however, are there any other femme fen who would like to correspond with me? Anywhere in the world, the USA, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Africa, France, Germany, Russia (whoops! no —Joe, I'm not a Communist) Mexico, Australia —especially Australia since I've never written to anyone from there. (I'm 23 years old and married for their information.)—*385 North 8th East St., Provo, Utah.*

The only way out for you is a subscription—$3.00 a year for a continuation of the super, scintillating, satisfying, supraliminal stuff and a guarantee that you get it every month.

Bergey's name got good and muddied out this trip, even a third eye is helpless here. But if you look at the contents page you'll find full credit. For you and Gibson we'll do it every month.

IDIOT'S DELIGHT

by Wallace Parsons

Dear Sam: You know, the first stf mag I ever read was the FSM featuring BEYOND PLUTO by J. S. Campbell. Then I tried TWS and SS. Since then I've always considered SS the finest in its field. After reading the August issue I know I'll never change. All the stories except MAJOR VENTURE (pure unadulterated trash) were excellent.

But when I read THE LOVERS I forgot all about the others. You picked the best stf story that will be written within the next ten years. In your editorial you said you hope it will be surpassed. But this story is so far ahead of modern stf that I'm sure it won't be. I fell in love with Jeannette myself, as deeply as Hal, and felt

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the same remorse at her death. You have a great new writer there; don't lose him.

Is that a Bergey cover? What I like about it is that instead of illustrating a scene from the novel it represents the whole story. You can't complain about that kind of cover, although some idiot will. And the science in the story really makes sense; that is, it seems to be correct.

The letter column was good. The best letter was by Philip Farmer. Trust a good author to write a good letter. A lot of people keep comparing other mags with SS and TWS. Do you know why I think Sam's mags are the best on the market? There's never a predominance of one type of story in an issue. Every issue is entirely different. And there's a story to suit every taste. Artwork is excellent. Most of the fen write intelligent letters and some are very entertaining. And Sam always has a good answer to each letter. I'd like to meet you some time; you sound like a great guy.

Speaking of letters, how about dropping some of the idiots (def.: idiot—stf poet) who waste time and space with trash such as that thing by Norman Browne and Oh, God, two poems in one ish—Eugene Pushkin. If he wants to write, let him write stf, or get a little older.—*73 Sprucehill Rd., Toronto, Ont.*

Forgive me, friends and poets. I couldn't resist it. There is something about an honest, frothing hate that is irresistible. Don't worry about Pushkin, he'll get older.

MOOTER GENDER

by L. R. Ford

Dear Sam: First letter to SS and all that sort of thing, but don't print it just for that. I got a purpose. Can't see myself getting all het up about lewd women or BEM'S on the cover (as a matter of fact I don't usually read the cover anyhow; not much plot) and the fantasy vs. stf question never disturbed me and doesn't. And if I don't like some of your stories (and I don't) I do like others. After all, you can't please everybody all of the time. Why this letter then? Hold your horses, I'll get around to it. It's an old discussion with a new twist.

I propose more science and less fiction in the Vibrating Ether. I feel with Mr. Cummins (cf point 6 in his letter) that my early brushes with stf gave me at least a wide conversational knowledge of science but it seems to me that some of the mooter points (no connection with the internal combustion engine of almost the same name) might profitably be discussed in the letter column. Mr. Durham has made a start. I note (in fact he inspired this ee-pistol along with your wobbly explanation. The recoil has nothing to do with the gases pushing against the breech block, eh? How big a recoil would you get if the breech block weren't there? The gases would dash madly off in the other direction, the bullet being in the way of their going forward and you might actually get a push in the opposite direction. In fact, the gases pushing against the breech block, bracing themselves to shove at the bullet are precisely Newton's reaction. (Yuk-yuk, give me another shot from that test tube, willya?)—*Champaign, Ill.*

You're right, we got our analogy turned around. The muzzle blast from a rifle is the same as the rocket's rear jet blast. Then the whole rifle is kicked ahead in the manner of a rocket taking off. But we'll never admit it publicly. Yuk.

STANDARDS AND STANDBYS

by Joe Gibson

Dear Sam: No comment on your recent editorials concerning good science fiction. I'm not too sure you have all the returns in yet. But The Lovers, this August SS, impressed me as having an "atmosphere" reminiscent of stf before the thud-and-blunder era. Which is something we should never have lost.

You will no doubt hear about the Bergey cover. In TEV, tho, you were telling me, "But sometimes one of two situations come up—" and wouldn't I rather have a good cover rather than a poor cover which illustrated a story? I don't want either one, Sam. Look, TWS and SS are fiction magazines, not art galleries. Your writers have to meet certain literary standards with their stories. Your artists should match those stories with their cover illos. The writers still have to turn out good science fiction while meeting your literary standards, so the artists should turn out good artwork while making it fit the stories. Every editor who has started kowtowing to artistic standards, rather than literary standards, has ended up with symbolic and surrealistic illustrations. Or they end up with super-grand covers, demanding that some writer hack out mediocre stories to fit those covers. Let's have none of that, chum. The editor who pats artists on the head and kicks writers around should be editing a girlie calendar, not a stf magazine.

Enough of this wrassling! Let's be fans. I see that Ray Capella, Jr., has clarified the situation regarding his full name, Raul Garcia Capella, Jr. Capella's a fine old name, too—has all sorts of historic connotations. For instance, in the constellation Auriga, which is Greek for Charioteer, there's a 1st magnitude star named Capella. It's a bright, G-type triple-star some 42 lightyears from here, which places it in the star group that includes Sol. Astronomers sometimes refer to it as "The Goat," and a nearby triangle of stars as "the kids"—mind you, I said *astronomers!*

Ah, well. I understand there was once a horse thief named Gibson.—*24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N.J.*

Will go along with you on the surrealistic illustrations, which leave me cold unless they are very good and precious few are very good. A cover on a fiction magazine, then, can serve one of two functions: it can illustrate a story in the magazine, which is interesting, though limited; or it can serve as a poster, catching attention, telling its own story. As such it doesn't have to be connected with any specific

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story inside. Most slick magazines follow this style; the Satevepost is famous for its poster-style covers. We ourselves aren't dedicated to any particular style. Where a story offers a good cover we use it. But many stories, however brilliant, somehow just do not provide good cover scenes, and many a conference with art director and cover artist has ended in frustration and with a novel spread all over the floor. There is also a time element—somebody is late on story or picture and schedules take a beating. In which case it is better to have a cover or two on hand than to go to press with a nice white blank page in front. In the future you will see covers from us which are the poster type, and you will see those which illustrate stories. Roger Dee's STAR DICE has a cover illustrating the story; in December Fletcher Pratt's THE LONG VIEW has an Emsh cover illustrating the story and in TWS for December Ken Crossen's new Manning Draco story, THE CAPHIAN CAPER, has a symbolic by Popp illustrating the story.

HEROES AND CLINCHES

by Jim Harmon

Dear Sam: The August cover looked a bit antiseptic with your commendable new design, so clean and neat, and such a cool, conservative color scheme. Oh, I know the conservative colors were to offset the lewd wench and little bems. I know how the murky little minds of you editors work. If you must have naked women, Sam—publicly, I mean—couldn't you make them young? This woman looked ancient—thirty at least. Perhaps, that's all right for elderly old duffers like you and Bixby—you're probably that old yourself—but not for we discriminating teen-age connoisseurs of beauty.

(Watch out for sneak plays, Sam. I say something like that to give me that advantage of surprise when I pull Einsteinian mathematics or Jungular psychology.)

You pulled a bubu with those bem-children, didn't someone, Sam? Hal and Jeannette's kids were human-appearing girls, not Ozagenians. I realize the scene was symbolic but somebody got their symbols mixed.

Which should bring us past your ballyhoo—did some Horace Gold rub off on you, Sam?—to the novel, THE LOVERS by Phillip José Farmer—for those who have just tuned in. (Gad, I feel witty, today.)

The story is very good, however I can't see how you could get *quite* so enthusiastic about it. It certainly isn't as significant in the field of science fiction as were van Vogt's SLAN and WORLD OF A when they first appeared or as the recent DEMOLISHED MAN by Alfred Bester—or to compare it with stories of a more comparable length, as Heinlein's GULF or Bradbury's THE FIREMAN. It is remarkable that such a finished story should come from a young beginning writer (his first sale?) but it doesn't make it an all-time great in the field. It is a mature story—characterization, situations, and environment are all logically consistant with one another. The theme is not completely original, but the treatment was fresh. Farmer's explanatory dialogues fell a little flat in spots. It would have been better if he had followed the fiction writer's first rule—*show* rather than *tell*—a bit more diligently. I realize the value of underwriting but I think a bit of purple would have been more effective in spots. For instance, I did not feel a strong emotional reaction at Jeannette's death. I think I would have if there had been a "I'm going but I'll love you always"—"No, no, you can't leave me" scene. Corny, clichecal, perhaps, but highly effective. Farmer does possess the attributes that can make a great writer—he has talent, imagination, human awareness, and other less definable things—but he needs development in the sheer mechanics of writing.

I feel there is another story in this issue which deserves considerable comment. I refer to MAJOR VENTURE AND THE MISSING SATELLITE by Charles E. Fritch. This is meant to show how ridiculous Captain Future is. I think it shows rather more markedly how ridiculous Charles T. Fritch is. I presume that you agree with him, Sam. I don't. Captain Future is a hero, an adventurer, a champion of the people, bigger than life, but this doesn't mean that it is ridiculous for such a man to exist. Such men have existed and I suspect they will continue to exist.

An insult against CF is not just an insult against Edmond Hamilton and the other editors and writers that shaped him, but against all the other great heroes of fact and fiction. Moreover it is an insult to all the people who have read of Captain Future, and in some hard-to-define way, *believe* in him. Finally, it is an insult to Curt Newton, who is a fine man.

Incidently, I disagree with you that the old stf stories are no longer great because they are outdated in some ways. Great literature may fall behind current accepted standards in some ways, but it doesn't cease to be immortal. You will admit, I trust, that Shakespeare's English is archaic but that his plays remain great.

I note that your novel is considerably shorter than you usually use, and that you present three novelets (though term one a short) instead of your usual one. You also admit in TEV that long novels are harder to get than short novels. You may remember that I predicted all of this, and that you heatedly denied it. It just goes to show, Sam, that the customer is always right.—*427 East 8th St., Mt. Carmel, Ill.*

If Jeannette looked only thirty she was doing well—she was several hundred years old, at least. Makes even Bixby and me feel like infants. Your idea of a farewell death scene between Hal and Jeannette gave me the creeps. This is what killed the movies—are you trying to undermine us?

Over your remarks anent Cap Future and Major Venture let us draw a merciful curtain.

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Aren't you glad now I cut out all you said about Tom Mix? And as far as old stories go, I never intimated that *all* literature aged badly. Bad literature ages badly, and though the idols topple like feet of clay I maintain that a lot of the old stf classics were plain bad. If they weren't I'd have less trouble picking stuff for FSM and the Annual.

And sometimes I wish I'd become a cop instead of an editor. In that business the customer is always wrong.

NONCOMFORMIST

by Joseph Dunlap Willcox

Dear Mr. Mines: SS has shown great improvement lately, but I think you overestimated THE LOVERS. Mr. Farmer has written an above average story but it has the plot of a Merritt tale and an ending much like DWELLER IN THE MIRAGE and it lacks the descriptive power which made the Merritt backgrounds so beautiful. Farmer's characters are not as lifelike as Merritt's and the latter never was strong in this respect. Farmer is not the author the Master of Fantasy was.

The best story I have ever read was THE HELLFLOWER. For the first time in an s-f story I encountered lifelike people who had normal responses to their problems. The victory of Earth over the aliens was a trifle easy, but the hero marrying the villainess made a very good ending. Plot a little weak, but action and background were superb.—*1123 N. 4th St., Milwaukee, Wis.*

We've got no quarrel over your taste in lovers, but comparing Farmer and Merritt really threw us. The two couldn't be more unlike. Merritt is the original master of the purple prose, where Farmer's style is fast and sparing of adjectives, clipped, modern, economical. Merritt wrote fantasy which was practically indistinguishable from fairy tale, whereas THE LOVERS is anything but fantasy.

DON'T LOOK BACK

by Bruce Barnett

Dear Mr. Mines: I agree wholeheartedly with your editorial comments in the August issue of SS except on one point. Writers are not using the same themes they employed fifteen years ago; its closer to ten years.

There seem to be two types of stories that predominate in science fiction magazines in general. The first is the space opera which many pulps use almost entirely. The second is the "cold lucid logic" type that John Campbell developed in ASF and which many other magazines have adopted. The space opera has been out of the running for years, even though it is still widely used. Back in 1945 the "logic" story was the last word in the field. It still is, but many fans are beginning to feel that it's wearing just a little bit thin.

Science fiction seems to have specialized too far. At any rate, the authors and editors in the field certainly have done so. Everybody tries to define science fiction, but nobody finds a definition that pleases everybody. They do find one that pleases themselves, though. If it's an editor, he only prints stories that fit his own idea of real science fiction. If it's a reader and a story disagrees with his definition he screams "fantasy" in an outraged voice, and that's the end of it. As a matter of fact, the *minute* you define science fiction you automatically limit the field.

When I look back over old science fiction magazines from the period roughly 1940-48 I find real old masterpieces that left a tremendous impact at the time. They aroused the emotions and stirred the imagination. Yes, I know, you say they creak, and so they do. But why do they creak now? Because some editor thought that that idea went over pretty well, so let's have a sequel or more stories on the same order.

That's the way it always is. I thought THE LOVERS was the best story I've read in a long time, but I won't ask for more like it. Too many editors have been influenced by the cry for "more like it." Then when it comes, it comes in such reams of copy that everyone gets good and sick of the whole idea. The original story then can be said to "creak" and can be relegated to the forgotten position of all antiquated stories. The classic example of this is the little-mourned demise of Captain Future. He was overworked so much that even the satire in MAJOR VENTURE was positively sickening.

All anybody asks is a new idea once in a while, an idea that is used once and then LET ALONE! And stop worrying about whether it's science fiction or not. If it isn't I don't think anyone will die of it. And if they do—well—tsk, tsk.—*1905 Los Robles, San Marino, Cal.*

This is a novel idea, one which would occur only to an incurable idealist. To how many scenes of childhood joys have you returned, only to find disillusionment? Well, it has happened to all of us. In cold fact, however, it sometimes happens that a theme is unfinished and will bear a sequel. It even happens sometimes that the sequel is better than the original. So brace yourself. Farmer is doing a sequel to THE LOVERS.

WHAT? NO CAP FUTURE?

by Henry Moskowitz

Mines Dear Sam,

The Lovers—The first time I heard of this story was when I made one of my "weekly" trips to your office. We started talking about Captain Future (Who else?). We got around to where you told me about this MSS you got in on the sludge line and Bix read it. He said there was stuff to it and told you to read it. You did and bought it. Or I hope you did.

Anyway, you said that I might not like it because of my apparent leaning toward space opera. I made no comment then, but I told you I'd let you

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know what I thought of it after I read it.

Well, I've read it. And I think it is the best novel SS has printed so far this year, except for *The Hellflower*. I could say something like this: GoshWowGeeWhizOhBoyOhBoyOhBoy! (Thanks, Greg.) But I won't. (I already have.) In fact, the words suitable fail me. But this I will say: It would seem to me that Philip Jose Farmer will be 1952's "Walter M. Miller, Jr." Last year Miller was the top new author of the year. His star is shining brightly. And Farmer's first gleam of his star is brilliant. I hope to see TL in hard-covers by year's end.

A good thing for you that Farmer's story was so good. He had a letter in the TEV. I figured that his took up the space that my missive would have taken. The letter was good, too. So all is forgiven.

If guys like Calkins will be running loose at the Chicon II, Sam, Bix, and I had better carry saps (you know, blackjacks). Marvin Williams and a lot of us are waiting for another Bracketale, so come on and move. That poetry in answer to Fletcher's and Anderson's poem letter sounds like Merwin, not Mines. (Who did it? Bix?) I must get in touch with this Capella chap, really. Thankx to Larry Ketcham Sam has put himself into public print on the CF annual deal. Someone is too writing CF stories; Henry Everett.

Will this letter see print? What's there to it? Of course it'll be printed. Sam likes me. (Don't you, Sam??) ((Sure, what did I tell you.))

That's all for now. See you next month.—*Three Bridges, N.J.*

Dad rat it, I did that poem myself. Just because I said in public I couldn't write poetry doesn't mean that I can't surpass myself in an emergency. But cut it out, fellers you hear?

SOUND EFFECTS
by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: On your August SS. The cover, to be exact. At first glance, I thought, "Dick, me bhoy, Sam has not only got a new and better foremat; he's also getting better covers." Then I took a closer look, and did a double-take. I assumed the scene to have come from *The Lovers*. In that case, just *what* are those happy little green individuals doing there? If they're supposed to be the wogglebugs, how come they're so diminutive? Besides, just where do they fit into the scheme of things there on the cover? Just the same, in the last two issues, the art has improved immensely, along with the foremat. Good going, Sam.

On to the letters. If that candidate for the happy factory, Siebel, makes snide remarks that bother you, and if you don't like the stuff he says, why print his letters? To tell the truth, I don't quite follow that guy's logic (?), and I doubt if anybody else but he does, too. I can snarl and growl just as loud and hard as he does (framp, framp—see?) but I see no need for sound effects in letters. They just make for harder reading. Just the same, it does sort of brighten (brighten? 'Scuse me—I meant foul) up the letter column a

[*Turn page*]

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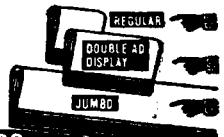

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little. But please. . . . no more Seibel.

As to ye editorial, from your remarks, I get the impression that S-F has been standing still over the past few years. You claim that it is not moving unless remarkable stories are outdated, or words to that effect. Well, SLAN is better than ten years old, it was a masterpiece, and it certainly isn't outdated; reprint after reprint is coming out now. You had it in your own summer FSM, and a new reprint has come out in book form. Everyone still enjoys it. But I don't think that S-F *has* been standing still; it has definitely been moving on. Although really top stories are few and far between, now, they always have been. It only seems now that there were more in "the good old days" because we can now read them all at once, if we want.

Well, that's it. With Norm drooling in his own particular type of ecstasy and Snarling Seibel happily babbling away about nothing in particular in the background, I say hasta la vista.—*410 Kensington Rd. Baltimore 29, Md.*

Those were baby wogglebugs. Why? Well we didn't know what Jeannette's children would look like (nymphs, the man said) so we just symbolized babies and we wanted to get the wogs into the picture somehow. Symbolism—deep stuff.

What makes you think I hate Seibel? I don't follow his logic either, but to me that makes the letters funnier. Thought it kind of livened things up.

As to SLAN—sure, SLAN was great stuff. It creaked a little (put down that blaster!) but it had loads of good stuff in it and didn't date badly at all. But most of the stories do date and do creak so loud you can't hear yourself read.

NEW CUSTOMER

by William S. Hawkins

Mr. Mines: While browsing through the racks at my favorite newsstand the other day, I was attracted by an unusually interesting cover. A cover far different from the type usually associated with "pulp" paper and untrimmed edges.

The interior of the magazine was just as interesting as the cover promised. Usually I restrict myself to the so called "Little Aristocrats" of science fiction. However I found myself with more than the usual amount of time on my hands and was forced to add something to my usual list of purchases. Your cover was the only one that promised any thing more than the usual run of "space operas" and fantasy.

I was amazed and somewhat thrilled at the breadth and depth of story that your editorial policy allows. By far the best was THE LOVERS by Philip Farmer. The ending, somehow, did not quite live up to the rest of the story. I cannot exactly describe the exact point where it did not; but it just was not quite as good as the remainder. MAJOR VENTURE AND THE MISSING SATELLITE was satire *par excellence*, many a laugh was had over the exploits of the intelligent spittoon; more power to Mr. Fritch. PAGE AND PLAYER AND HERE LIES BOTTLETHWAITE were above the average in Science Fiction, but the less said about the other two little episals the better.

All is not a bed of roses, however. The untrimmed pages in a magazine of your caliber are absolutely unexcusable. The interior illustrations could also be improved somewhat; have you ever tried Cartier? He is one of my favorites and the favorite of many others also.

I shall be looking forward to your next issue, until then, good luck and good hunting.—*220 Golden Gate Ave. San Francisco, California.*

If trimmed edges are an absolute necessity to your happiness, William, we will personally shave a copy of SS for you every month with our own hand-powered razor. As another of the hecklers remarked a while back, "The customer is always right." But thanks for joining the fold—we're glad to have you and glad you were so pleasantly surprised at the way the other half lives.

Sheer lack of space, not to mention exhaustion, forces us to cut this off, while we eye with chagrin and despair the stacks and stacks of good letters yet remaining. Let's get a mention or two in. To Robert Hughes, our appreciation for your comments, and the same to Harold Wolinsky who, with Ken Crossen, sent a batch of magazines to Israel, as per plea in the July issue. Canadian Forest Ranger Robert McKay is looking for copies of SS for Summer and Winter 1943, Summer and Fall 1944, and Spring and Winter 1945, for TWS previous to January 1951. Write him care of D. C. MacKechnie, 826—23rd Ave. N. W., Calgary, Alta.

Guy E. Terwilliger tees off on Snarly Seibel (take to the woods, Ed, the pack is really loose) for his statement about adults not being interested in fantasy and lets drop a little sneer at the Cap Future boys.

Jan Romanoff looks up from his chore of editing the new fan mag FANTASTIC WORLDS to say that THE LOVERS was one of the best stories—science fiction or other kind—he has ever read and to offer congratulations on finding a new brilliant writer.

Bruce Beatie, 1986 Geary Rd., Walnut Creek, California, offers the theory that Ed (the Sly One) Seibel judges magazines by feeling them and comparing their feel with past issues.

Terrible Terry Zimmerman thanks us for not printing his first letter and notes that though THE LOVERS was good, he likes Crossen better. (We didn't print your second one either, Terry, do we get thanked for that?)

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John J. Phillipent of 13 Dancer Road, London, S.W. 6, notes that he has been an engineer for 15 years, yet wonders if he could spread all the science needed for a story neatly into its pages without having it leak like a net curtain. Orchids to our authors.

Miss Pearl Appleford of 75 Kensington Drive, Durban North, Durban, South Africa, appeals for correspondents—stf mags are rare in South Africa and her joy at receiving the magazines will doubtless be vastly increased by receiving some letters.

Miss Mildred Moore of 116 William St., Highstown, N. J., wants to know what the shouting is about over Cap Future and where can she get a Cap Future story to read? Moskowitz, are you listening?

George Stevens marks his 45th copy of SS with the August ish and Ray Thompson loves Bergey on the August ish, but could have done without the "bemettes." And Gregg (Oopsla Calkins) wasn't entirely happy about THE LOVERS or its cover. The story was good but dark, the cover br-r-r. Gregg is strictly the JOURNEY TO BARKUT and HELL-FLOWER type.

Nick Cottrell of San Mateo, Cal. likes THE LOVERS, Bixby's columns and the editorials (we knew if we lived long enough we'd run into someone who liked them!) doesn't like covers that do not illustrate a story.

That tears it again, fellow sufferers. See you all right back here next month.

—The Editor

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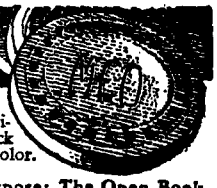

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REVIEW OF THE CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

ONCE again we have a goodly number of fanzines on hand . . . but first a couple of items:

A new fanzine is in the making, and will gleefully consider your fiction, poetry, articles. Name: BREVIZINE. Address: Warren Freiberg, 5018 West 18th Street, Cicero 50, Illinois.

Next, a line from Hank Moskowitz: "To those readers . . . who have just lately begun reading science fiction: Are you wondering about this thing called 'fandom?' . . . Young Fandom, a club for new readers . . . will help you get in touch with others of your own age who also read and enjoy this wonderful type of literature . . . Here you will find an infinite field of discussion . . . get into the swing of things! Contact Rick Sneary, 2962 Santa Ana Street, South Gate, California."

Next, Dick Clarkson of the Baltimore group informs us:

1) That Orv Mosher III of 1728 Mayfair, Emporia, Kansas, is still at work on that booklet we mentioned once before: "How to Form a Science-Fiction Fanclub." He needs all the tips, hints suggestions and general dope he can get on the subject. It should be a valuable little gizmo . . . wouldn't you like to have contributed to it? Then do.

2) That Howard K. Pruyn is compilating the "first all-inclusive list of fans the world over." He wants your name and address, and any other names and addresses you can give him where he can obtain more n. & a. etc., ad infinitum . . . get it? One thing: for how many hours would such a list be "all-inclusive?"

Next, we are notified that the fanzines we review are, in contradiction of this column's title, not exactly "current." This is true. Not a thing we can do about it. We review 'em soon after we get 'em; two months later the magazine hits the stands. Gestation.

Also, in reply to a number of agonized bleats we've received: this column, ROTCSFFP, is a

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review of fanzines: the Frying Pan, in TWS, is *not*. The latter is a fan-slanted column of the chat-type, where we can blow off steam, make with snide comments, and generally inspect the stfield fan and pro.

Speaking of which, we saw a so-called stf show on TV recently which practically made us whoops on the carpet . . . but no space to roast it here. Comes the next Frying Pan, however. . . .

To fanzines:

SPACE DIVERSIONS, published under the auspices of the Liverpool Science-Fiction Society, 13-A St. Vincent Street; Liverpool 3, England. Editor: Tom Owens and John Roles. Published bi-monthly. Free to members; price to non-members: two for one b OB (b OB? . . . what does it mean?).

A first issue . . . good production job. Contains stories, articles, departments, the latter mostly concerned with local doings.

THE BULLETIN OF THE CLEVELAND SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY, 12701 Shaker Boulevard, Apartment 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio. Editor: Harlan Ellison. Published monthly. 15c per copy; twelve issues and an annish for $1.50.

Fairly big one . . . varied, sprightly. Worth the price of admission. Editor Ellison states in his accompanying letter that "the Cleveland Public Library, one of the largest in the country, has taken my 'zine for their files because of its high quality. . . ."

An achievement . . . congratulations!

A CHECKLIST OF BRITISH SCIENCE AND FANTASY, obtainable from Dale R. Smith, 3744 Oakland Avenue, Minneapolis 7, Minnesota. Produced by Eric Bentcliffe. 25c per copy.

The title is self-explanatory . . . good neat job.

OOPSLA, 761 Oakley Street, Salt Lake City 16, Utah. Editor: Gregg Calkins. Published every sixth Tuesday. Three issues for 30c; $1.00 per year.

A steady comer . . . good articles, departments; some moderately respectable satire.

We've just got to get the following off our chest:

"Goshwow, geewhiz, ohboy, yea man!"
Began the letter from a fan;
From all this spunk, who'd ever thunk
That Calkins thunk our stories stunk?

FAN-FARE, 119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York. Editor: W. Paul Ganley. Published bi-monthly. 15c per copy; six for 75c

Fandom's all-fiction 'zine . . . wel-l-ll, *mostly* fiction, anyway. Tolerable to rather good. Verse ditto Features likewise Mimeographing about as good as you can get. Give it a try if fan-fiction etc. is up your alley.

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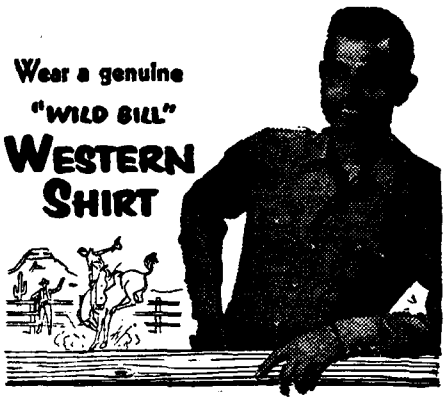

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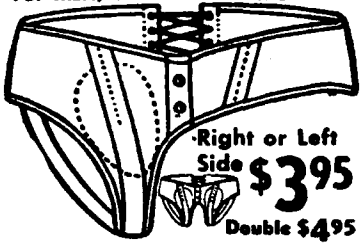

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PEON, edited and published by Charles Lee Riddle, PNCA, USN, U. S. Navy Underwater Sound Laboratory, Fort Trumbull, New London, Connecticut. Published irregularly. 15c per copy; nine issues for $1.00; free copies upon request to overseas fans and members of the U. S. Armed Forces.

One of the best all-around fanzines . . . always lively, readable; never schlopped up with "eek, wow, ugh, gurgle, drool, slurp, etc." Articles, fiction, departments. The fiction could be booted out with little loss. Production exceptionally good for a mimeoed 'zine.

Lee's resounding address (above) reminds us of a lunch we had recently with George O. Smith. In discussing a novel he is currently finishing for us, George explained, with a twinkle in each of his three eyes, that the alphabet-like coded military designation in Chapter thus-and-so broke down to mean (roughly): "The Jet-propelled Underwater Carrier-Pigeon Bombing Project."

Vas you dere, Riddle?

SHANGRI-LA, 1305 West Ingraham, Los Angeles, California, Editors: Audrey Clinton, Ed M. Clinton, Jr., Eph Konigsberg.

Divided into two sections, backed up upside-down to each other a la C/SFD: the Light Side and the Sober Side. Articles (an interesting one on non-pro rocket societies by Arthur Louis Joquel), reviews, satire, art . . . the only blot is a story by L. *Major Reynolds*, which *geschtuncken*.

STOPGAP, "a letter, circular or publication," Box 182, Broadway, P. O., Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Editor: Graham B. Stone.

More concise fan-pro stuff from Down Under.

FANTASY-TIMES, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing 54, New York. Editor: James V. Taurasi. Published bi-weekly. 10c per copy; twelve issues for

Newsy and up-to-date . . . Taurasi gets pertinent news items, and usually gets 'em first.

CONFUSION Box 493, Lynn Haven, Florida. Editor: Shelby Vick. Published monthly. 5c per copy; twelve issues for 50c.

Good job . . . equally readable where it is tongue-in-cheek or of serious mien . . . we enjoyed 99 44/100 of it.

VANATIONS, 13906 101a Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Editor: Norman G. Browne. Published bi-monthly.

A starter which leaps immediately into the middle ranks, instead of creeping around on forlorn circles way down *there*.

In other words, not bad . . . not bad atall.

Mostly humor, satire, etc. Also a piece on fantasy censorship in Canada which makes us itch to kick somebody's behind off . . . banning the *Arabian Nights* and C. E. S. Wood's *Heavenly Discourse*, indeed! May galloping impetigo attend these nitwits who equate their individual viewpoint

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with Truth and Light and hand down dispensations restricting what the rest of us may and may not read, see and hear! The whole business of censorship cries out for standardization on a sound socio-psychological basis—

Are we still on the air?

In connection with which: on p. 4 of VANATIONS is a list of quotes, mostly from TWS and SS, entitled WHAT THE CENSOR MISSED. . . .

Now, we happen to have personally edited every one of those stories from the Thrilling mags, so *we* must have missed said quotes . . . except that we didn't; we found nothing objectionable in them; we still don't; we're flabbergasted that anyone *did*.

Such a squawk in the same 'zine with the censorship article . . . tsk. Anyone for schizophrenia?

Or—hold on—was you kidding?

Cover of VANATIONS is a photograph . . . rocketship buzzing midwestern city. Good. In fact, all the art in V. is good.

STF TRADER, Box 3, Tyro, Kansas. Editor: K. Martin Carlson. 10c per copy; four for 25c.

Advertisements . . . a goodly number of stf items to swap and sell.

(Personal to collectors: we are in the market for any and all collections of short stories by Maurice Level. Can anyone give us a hand without taking an arm?)

SI-FIC, "A fanzine of the Atomic Age," 512 45th Street, Union City, New Jersey. Editor: Daniel E. MacMurray.

Two sheets of paper, cover and contents respectively . . . the latter being a short nonsensical bit from the fanzine JOKER. We presume the entire effort to be a sort of advance notice, blurb, throwaway for JOKER, which has yet to make its appearance . . . a bid for attention and material.

Quote: "JOKER will cater only to stf cartoons, jokes and short funny stories . . . if you are interested, please write for further information."

How about STFun? Or GAGaxy (sorry, Horace). Instead of JOKER, that is.

PSFS NEWS, perpetrated by Dave Hammond, Box 89, Runnemede, New Jersey.

More chat on the doings of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society. . . .

Yeah, we *are* kind of mad, Dave . . . to know what's holding up those flowers on ye wench's impressive facade. Thumbtacks?

BREVIZINE, 5018 West 18th Street, Cicero 50, Illinois. Editor: Warren A. Freiberg. Published monthly. 10c per copy; three for 25c.

Tiny little critter . . . this is the one we mentioned in our introductory noises . . . contains reviews, fiction, articles, letters, quotes from various pro sources.

Concerning this one, and *all* first issues . . . we

[*Turn page*]

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doubt that anything is more heartening to the trembling newcomer to the field than contributions of material, subscriptions, et al. We have gathered over this past year that fanzines are rarely financially profitable . . . that more often than not they just break even, or even run at a loss; so it must be (we figure) the interchange that keeps most of 'em in business. Editor A shells out cash and effort and puts to gether his 'zine; Editor B does likewise. Then each subscribes to, and contributes to, the other's 'zine, and, roughly, in the end it all comes out even. Take this to the eighth power, rack up a few exceptions and you have a fair picture of the fan-publishing world. Point is: dig up a little dough for the newcomers . . . 25c, 50c. The cash you cast upon the waters will come back in the shape of new friends, contacts, ideas. It doesn't take much money at all to keep a 'zine going . . . but it'll sure die without it.

We know most of you already do this. The reminder is to those who don't know how it works.

Egoboo? Back-patting society? Intellectual inbreeding? Flight from reality? H'm, we'll leave the evaluations to anyone brave enough to pick up the first stone and heave it.

ADOZINE, 2058 East Atlantic Street, Philadelphia 34, Pennsylvania. Editor: W. C. Butts. 10c per copy; 50c per year.

Another bite-sized swapzine . . . still looks a little desperate for material.

Couple of issues ago we mentioned the forthcoming FANTASTIC WORLDS . . . and forgot to give its address. Here, for those who have asked, 'tis:

Ed Ludwig, Editor
FANTASTIC WORLDS
1942 Telegraph Avenue
Stockton, California

Our gorgeous secretary just brought in another copy of SPACE DIVERSIONS, reviewed earlier in this column . . . which reminds us to remind you that: it isn't necessary to send us two copies of your fanzine, one to TWS, one to SS. In the first place, as we said a while back, TWS doesn't review; in the second place, we wouldn't review the same 'zine twice, even if TWS *did* review.

By the way, we cannot help but notice in the fanzines that SS and TWS are getting the nicest things said about them. This makes Sam and me—to drop that editorial "we" for a moment—real happy.

—*JEROME BIXBY.*

Next Month—a Satirical Novelet of Tomorrow's Television

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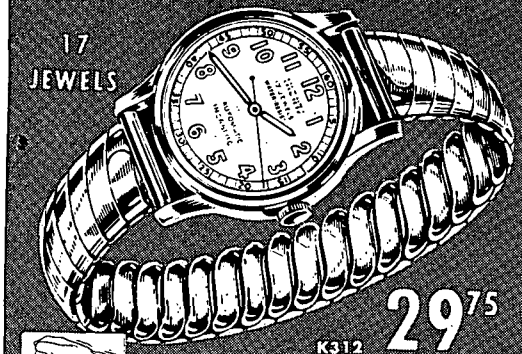

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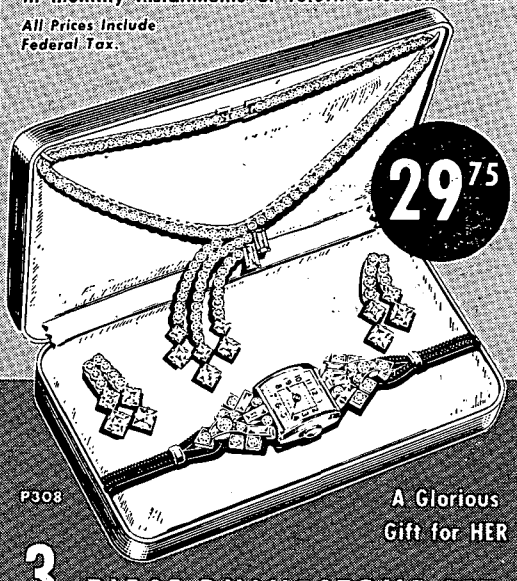

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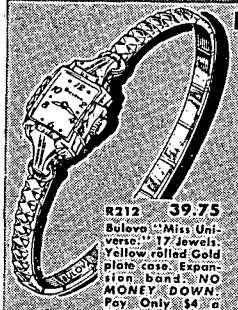

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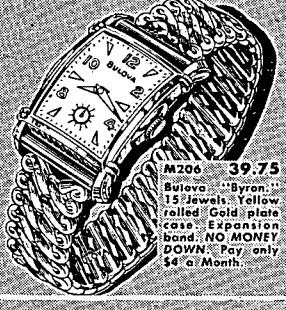

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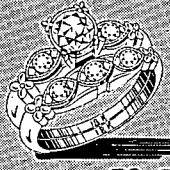

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